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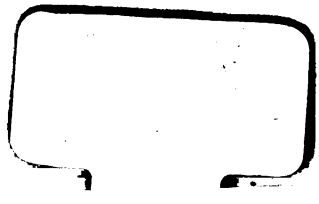

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THOMAS CARLYLE
AS A CRITIC OF LITERATURE

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AS A CRITIC OF LITERATURE

BY
FREDERICK WILLIAM ROE, PH.D.

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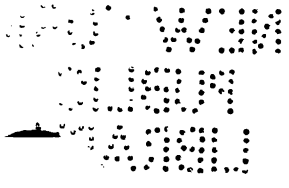

This Monograph has been approved by the Department of English in Columbia University as a contribution to knowledge worthy of publication.

A. H. THORNDIKE,

Secretary.

It is a strange work with me, studying these Essays over again: ten years of my life lie strangely written there; it is I, and it is not I, that wrote all that! They are as I could make them—among the peat-bogs and other confusions. It rather seems the people like them in spite of all their crabbedness. CARLYLE to his Mother, 1839 (*New Letters*, I, 178).

PREFACE

The present study was begun some four years ago at the suggestion of Professor W. P. Trent and of the late Professor George R. Carpenter. It was thought that an account of Carlyle as a critic of literature would be of value, not only as an appreciation of a great personality on a different side from that usually considered, but also as a contribution to the history of literary criticism in England. In this belief, and with these ends in view, the following chapters have been written. The new interpretation in the first chapter of Carlyle's so-called conversion has not been made without a searching examination of the published biographical material, and with the sole purpose of setting the facts in their right relations.

To the English department of Columbia University under whose direction I have worked my obligations are many. It is a pleasure to record my gratefulness to Professor Trent, whose criticism and encouragement have been constant and helpful. My thanks are also due to Professor Brander Matthews and to Professor W. A. Neilson, formerly of Columbia, now of Harvard University, for stimulating suggestions. To Professor A. H. Thorndike, who went over the entire work in manuscript with me, I am especially indebted for much valuable criticism.

I am grateful also to Professor J. W. Cunliffe, and to Associate Professor H. B. Lathrop, of the English department of the University of Wisconsin, for kindly interest and counsel.

In the preparation of this essay I have used the following books, besides others to which reference is made in the footnotes: Carlyle's *Works* (especially the *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays* in seven volumes, copyright edition, Chapman and Hall, London); *Reminiscences by Thomas Carlyle* (2 vols., ed. Norton, New York, 1887); *Early Letters* (ed. Norton, New York, 1886); *Letters, 1826–1836* (ed. Norton, New York,

1889); *Correspondence between Goethe and Carlyle* (ed. Norton, New York, 1887); *Correspondence of Thomas Carlyle and Ralph Waldo Emerson* (2 vols., rev. ed., Boston, 1886); *New Letters of Thomas Carlyle* (2 vols., New York, 1904); *Letters and Memorials of Jane Welsh Carlyle* (ed. Froude, 2 vols., New York, 1883); *New Letters and Memorials of Jane Welsh Carlyle* (2 vols., New York, 1903); *Collectanea, Thomas Carlyle* (ed. S. A. Jones, Canton, Pa., 1903); *Lectures on the History of Literature* (London, 1892); *Two Note-Books of Thomas Carlyle* (ed. Norton, New York, *The Grolier Club,* 1898); *Last Words of Thomas Carlyle* (New York, 1892); *Thomas Carlyle* (life by Froude, 4 vols., New York, 1882 and 1884); *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Thomas Carlyle* (by Shepherd and Williamson, 2 vols., London, 1881); *Edinburgh Sketches and Memories* (by Masson, London, 1892); Bielschowsky's *Life of Goethe* (3 vols., by Cooper, New York, 1907–8).

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CHAPTER I

The Foundation of a Literary Life

It was an integral part of the faith of Thomas Carlyle that circumstances do not wholly determine human destiny. Like the belief of so many great men this of Carlyle's was rooted in personal experience. The struggles of his early life, prolonged and intensified in exceptional measure, proclaim the power of the human will. Yet it is scarcely a paradox to affirm that upon Carlyle, perhaps the most conspicuous example of individualism in the nineteenth century, the influence of environment was both powerful and permanent. "He knew the world profoundly," says Mr. Brownell, "but he viewed it from Ecclefechan."[1] His birth in this village of southern Scotland; his descent from Covenanter stock; his boyhood among a sternly moral but narrow-minded peasantry, in the midst of a rigid, if not a harsh, domestic economy, all had their part in fashioning a character fairly steeped in racial and religious prejudice. These early surroundings left upon him an impress that education and contact with the world never effaced. Into all his writings, from essay to history, there went something of the narrowness and austerity, together with something of the harshness, of the Scottish peasant.

Though his life at Ecclefechan was anything but joyful, Carlyle gratefully recognized its worth.[2] "I too," says Teufelsdröckh, "acknowledge the all-but omnipotence of early culture and nurture." James Carlyle, the father, was what the son might have become had he never left his native village. In intellectual, moral and religious temper there was a remarkable similarity between the elder and the younger Carlyle. Like his son, the stone-mason possessed a native strength of mind, a rough controlling force of will, a stubborn integrity in all his work and dealing, together with a frank contempt for life on

[1] *Victorian Prose Masters*, 94. [2] *Rem.*, I, 44 (Norton's edition).

its lighter sides. Though deeply religious, he was "irascible" and "choleric," and his grim taciturnity made his heart seem "as if walled in."[3] He distrusted poetry and fiction as ministering to worldly pleasures. "He never, I believe," says his son, "read three pages of Burns's Poems; poetry, fiction in general, he had universally seen treated as not only idle, but *false* and criminal."[4] The speech of James Carlyle was bold, metaphorical, and humorously exaggerated—"he said a thing and it ran through the country."[5] Mental characteristics prominent in the elder Carlyle reappeared almost without exception in the son, though they were somewhat softened by the mild affectionate nature of the mother. There was little enough of love in Thomas Carlyle, little enough of the gentleness that sometimes tempers great natures; but there was very considerably more affection in him than in his father. "The strongest personal passion which he experienced through all his life," says Froude, "was his affection for his mother."[6] The relations between Margaret Carlyle and her gifted son, as revealed in numerous letters, were touchingly sympathetic, and they go far to explain the depth and warmth of human feeling in the essay on Burns and in the *Life of John Sterling*.

The boy's education began at home mainly under the direction of his father.[7] "He had 'educated' me," says Carlyle, "against much advice, I believe, and chiefly, if not solely, from his own noble faith; James Bell (one of our wise men) had told him: 'Educate a boy, and he grows up to despise his ignorant parents.' My father once told me this; and added: 'Thou has not done so, God be thanked for it!'"[8] At about seven the lad was put into the village school, where he began Latin and where he was reported "complete in English."[9] "Swamped" here in the Latin, he was "pulled afloat" by the minister's son, when he made "rapid and sure" way. At ten

[3] *Ibid.*, I, 15.

[4] *Ibid.*, I, 12, 14; cf. Conway, *Thomas Carlyle*, 32.

[5] Masson, *Edinburgh Sketches*, 281. [6] *Life*, I, 188; cf. *Rem.*, I, 16.

[7] "Of my letters taught me by my mother, I have no recollection whatever; of reading scarcely any" (*Rem.*, I, 45).

[8] *Ibid.*, I, 18. [9] Froude, *Life*, I, 13.

he was taken by his father to Annan Academy. School life at this place "among those coarse tyrannous cubs" (the boys who tormented young Carlyle so long as he obeyed his mother's command not to fight) left embittered memories; but there was real intellectual progress. "Latin and French I did get to read with fluency. Latin quantity was a frightful chaos, and I had to learn it afterwards; some geometry. Algebra, arithmetic, tolerably well. Vague outlines of geography I learnt; all the books I could get were also devoured. Greek consisted of the alphabet merely."[10]

The four years at Annan were followed by the university course at Edinburgh, where Carlyle satisfied his passion for knowledge in the midst of most discouraging conditions. Professor Masson's gleanings from old university records yield some definite information as to the studies which were there pursued. For the first session Carlyle was registered in a humanity class (which meant Latin) and a first Greek class; for the second, he took up mathematics and logic, since there was no second course in Latin. Greek and mathematics were continued the third year, and moral philosophy was begun. The classics and philosophy were dropped in the fourth year, while mathematics was kept up, along with natural philosophy.[11] Carlyle's class-work at the university ended in the summer of 1813, in his eighteenth year, when he was qualified for the M.A. degree. This he did not take; "but in that," says Professor Masson, "he was not in the least singular."[12] If Carlyle's fellow-students predicted his future on the showing he made in the class room, they must have reserved him for distinction in mathematics; for in this branch alone did he display enthusiasm and talent, chiefly because of the superior teaching of Professor Leslie. "For several years," he says, "geometry shone before me as the noblest of all sciences, and I prosecuted it in all my best hours and moods."[13]

[10] *Ibid.*

[11] Masson, *Edinburgh Sketches*, 230–236.

[12] *Ibid.*, 239.

[13] Froude, *Life*, I, 21. Froude says that Carlyle carried off no prizes (I, 21); Masson (*Edinburgh Sketches*, 234) refers to a tradition that he took first prize in the second mathematical class. There is abundant proof,

The account of his studies in Latin and Greek offers a suggestive contrast: "In the classical field," he records, "I am truly as nothing. Homer I learnt to read in the original with difficulty, after Wolf's broad flash of light thrown into it; Æschylus and Sophocles mainly in translations. Tacitus and Virgil became really interesting to me; Homer and Æschylus above all; Horace, egotistical, *leichtfertig,* in sad fact I never cared for; Cicero, after long and various trials, always proved a windy person and a wearisome to me, extinguished altogether by Middleton's excellent though misjudging life of him."[14] Crippled in Greek in the preparatory stage, Carlyle did not much increase his knowledge of it at the university. He never made up this deficiency, and the little Greek he knew "must have faded from disuse," according to the opinion of Professor Masson.[15] Precisely how much his work in criticism suffered from this limited acquaintance with the language and literature of Greece it is of course not possible to say. No study could have removed the native bias of his mind, for Carlyle was born a romanticist. Still it is hard not to believe that a sound classical training would have much increased his appreciation of essentially literary values, such as individual beauties of thought and phrase, and have given to his critical faculties a balance and restraint which they so often failed to exercise. For we should not forget that apart from the poorly taught and wholly inadequate classics, Carlyle had no university study to

in any case, of his excellence in mathematics. Philosophy under "the famous Brown" fell upon Carlyle as "mere dazzle and moonshine" (*ibid.,* 235).

[14] Froude, *Life,* I, 20.

[15] *Edinburgh Sketches,* 230. Carlyle's appreciation of Greek literature as expressed in his *Lectures* on the history of literature seems limited, cursory, and not enthusiastic. His remarks on the whole indicate that he was in a field which he neither knew well nor greatly cared to know (cf. *Lectures,* 36). A sentence here and there in the essays records a liking for Homer (*e. g., Essays,* III, 161). "Plato he does not read," said Emerson, "and he disparaged Socrates" (Emerson, *Works,* V, 16; cf. Conway, *Life,* 91; *New Letters and Memorials of Jane Welsh Carlyle,* Intro., 81; *Correspondence, Emerson and Carlyle,* II, 218). Carlyle expresses but a feeble interest in the neo-classicism of Goethe.

awaken his interest and cultivate his taste in the formal elements of literature.

His real university was the library, where he found the materials for laying the foundation of a literary life. His passion for reading has already been referred to, but the time of its appearance it is not possible to fix; probably Carlyle himself did not remember. He may have read the *Arabian Nights,* for example, before he went to Annan. His reference to his father's prohibition against this book indicates that there had been a copy at home.[16] Many of the books that were devoured at Annan were novels, some of Smollett's being among them.[17] But after Carlyle entered Edinburgh, a greatly expanded taste in reading developed. Professor Masson found a record of the following volumes, drawn from the University library during December and January of Carlyle's first term: "*Robertson's History of Scotland,* Vol. II; Cook's *Voyages;* Byron's *Narrative, i. e.,* 'the Honorable John Byron's Narrative of the Great Distresses suffered by Himself and his companions on the Coast of Patagonia, 1740–6'; the first volume of Gibbon; two volumes of Shakespeare; a volume of the *Arabian Nights,* Congreve's *Works;* another volume of the *Arabian Nights;* two volumes of Hume's *England; Gil Blas;* a third volume of Shakespeare; and a volume of the *Spectator.*"[18] For a youth of fourteen with no guide but his own instincts, this is, as Professor Masson points out, a remarkable list of books, especially if we consider that probably not one of them had anything to do with the boy's academic studies. The next year he read with equal independence in the selection of titles. Besides several volumes of travel and voyages, he took from the library Fielding, Smollett, a translation of *Don Quixote,* and two or three works in philosophy.[19] The records for the last two years are lost, but this youthful passion for reading must have rapidly increased. To the end of his life Carlyle felt that the one service Edinburgh University rendered him was

[16] It is interesting to know that the crabbed grandfather, Thomas Carlyle, had a liking for *Arabian Nights. Rem.,* I, 29.

[17] Conway, *Life,* 32.

[18] *Edinburgh Sketches,* 231.

[19] *E. g.,* Reid's *Inquiry* and Locke's *Essay.*

the use of its library. "From the chaos of that Library," says Teufelsdröckh, "I succeeded in fishing-up more books perhaps than had been known to the very keepers thereof. The foundation of a Literary Life was hereby laid; I learned, on my own strength, to read fluently in almost all cultivated languages, on almost all subjects and sciences; farther, as man is ever the prime object to man, already it was my favorite employment to read character in speculation, and from the writing to construe the Writer."[20] In his inaugural address before the university in 1866, there is similar testimony: "What I have found the University did for me, is, That it taught me to read."[21]

Scattered accounts of Carlyle's reading from 1813 to 1819, when he began to study German, show a steady trend toward a literary life and throw much light upon his intellectual development. While at Annan (1814–16) he read "incessantly."[22] We can judge of the range of this reading from his early letters which begin at this period and contain numerous allusions to books. "What books have you been reading?" he writes to his friend Mitchell, "And how did you like Shakespeare? Since I saw you I have toiled through many a thick octavo—many of them to little purpose. Byron's and Scott's *Poems* [I have read] and must admire—though you recollect, *we* used

[20] *Sartor*, 79.

[21] *Essays*, VII, 174. If the passage quoted above from *Sartor* be understood to refer to Carlyle's four years at the University, it is undoubtely an over-statement. "Only in Latin and French, and to some extent in Greek," says Masson, "could he have ranged beyond English in his readings; nor can his readings, in whatever language, have been so vast and miscellaneous as Teufelsdrockh's" (*Edinburgh Sketches*, 240). Carlyle probably included the browsings not only of four college years, but of a much longer period, extending down to 1820 and even later; together with the continual reading done in the library of Edward Irving and elsewhere. He was in Edinburgh as a divinity student, it will be remembered, during the first year after his college course. Then came the mastership in mathematics at Annan Academy for two years, followed by the mastership of a school at Kirkaldy, set up in opposition to one conducted by Irving. This position Carlyle threw up in disgust at the end of 1818, and again went to Edinburgh with Irving, where he lived for most of the time (broken by vacations at home and journeyings with the Bullers) until his removal to Craigenputtock in 1828.

[22] Froude, *Life*, I, 29.

to give Campbell a decided preference, and I still think, with justice. Have you ever seen Hoole's *Tasso?* I have among many others read *it, Leonidas* (Glover's), the *Epigoniad* (Wilkie's), *Oberon,*[28] Savage's *Poems,* etc. Miss Porter's *Scottish Chiefs* and *Waverley* have been the principal of my novels. With regard to *Waverley* I cannot help remarking that in my opinion it is the best novel that has been published these thirty years."[24] In addition to these works, many others were read during the two years at Annan. In English he read Akenside,[25] Crabbe,[26] Miss Porter's *Thaddeus of Warsaw,*[27] Scott's *Guy Mannering*[28] and *Waterloo,*[29] Chesterfield, *The Spectator* ("his jaunty manner but ill accorded with my sulky humours"),[30] Hume's *Essays* ("as a whole I am delighted with the book"),[31] Berkeley's *Principles of Knowledge,*[32] together with numerous works on travel and mathematics, including Newton's *Principia.*[33] Among French works, he read Voltaire's *La Pucelle,*[34] Molière's *Comédies,*[35] and some few extracts of Fénelon's *Dialogues des Morts.* Carlyle's efforts with Greek continued unfruitful. He writes to Mitchell: "I am glad to hear that you are getting forward so well with Homer—I know almost nothing about him—having never read anything but Pope's translation, and not above a single book of the original, and that several years ago. Indeed I know very little of the Greek at any rate. I have several times begun to read Xenophon's *Anabasis* completely; but always gave it up in favour of something else."[36] At this period there were also Cicero's *De Officiis* and Lucan's *Pharsalia,*[37] the latter no doubt in translation.

His life at Kirkcaldy was brightened by the companionship of the gifted Edward Irving, who possessed a good library.

[28] "Doubtless Sotheby's version of Wieland's *Oberon.*" Norton.
[24] *Early Letters,* 9.
[25] "I like it"; *ibid.,* 23.
[26] *Ibid.,* 35.
[27] *Ibid.,* 16.
[28] *Ibid.,* 20.
[29] *Ibid.,* 32.
[30] *Ibid.,* 34.
[31] *Ibid.,* 21.
[32] *Ibid.,* 25
[33] *Ibid.,* 35.
[34] "V. is the most impudent, blaspheming, libidinous blackguard that ever lived." *Ibid.,* 17.
[35] Conway, *Life,* 166.
[36] *Early Letters,* 35.
[37] *Ibid.,* 31.

"Irving's library was of great use to me; Gibbon, Hume, etc., I think I must have read it almost through."[38] "We had books from Edinburgh College-Library too."[39] Mathematics was giving way to "history and other lighter matters,"[40] while the books mentioned in the early letters indicate that he read with avidity whatever he could find in English and French. Gibbon and Hume were read through, and probably Robertson, if he had not been read earlier.[41] "The whole historical triumvirate are abundantly destitute of virtuous feeling—or indeed of any feeling at all."[42] Carlyle read fiction, but with diminishing pleasure, except in the case of Scott's novels, in which his interest was still keen. "You have no doubt seen the *Tales of my Landlord*," he writes. "Certainly, *Waverley* and *Mannering* and the *Black Dwarf* were never written by the same person."[43] The perusal of eight volumes of Smollett "and others, was a much harder and more unprofitable task,"[44] than the reading of history; and yet in spite of his developing taste for more serious books the earlier pleasure in romantic stories was not wholly dead. "The other night I sat up till four o'clock reading Matthew Lewis's *Monk*. It is the most stupid and villainous novel I have read for a great while."[45] *Lalla Rookh,* and *Childe Harold,* canto fourth, were also a part of the reading of this period. In French there were Pascal's *Lettres Provinciales,*[46] Mme. de Staël's *Germany,*[47] La Rouchefoucault,[48] and Montaigne,[49]—if we may infer from a brief quotation from him. "On Irving's shelves," Carlyle says, "were the small Didot French Classics in quantity, with my appetite sharp."[50] Everything, in fact, in English and French was greedily devoured by the maturing young schoolmaster. Not books of literature only, but of mathematics, theology, philosophy, and travel filled the spare hours; and the corre-

[38] *Rem.*, II, 28.
[39] *Ibid.*, 28.
[40] *Early Letters*, 61.
[41] *Ibid.*, 69.
[42] *Ibid.*, 69.
[43] *Early Letters*, 43.
[44] *Ibid.*, 68.
[45] *Ibid.*, 58.
[46] *Ibid.*, 49.
[47] *Ibid.*, 57.
[48] *Ibid.*, 61.
[49] *Ibid.*, 77.
[50] *Rem.*, II, 28.

spondence of these years alludes to considerable reading not specifically mentioned.

It would be unsafe to generalize extensively on the basis of this early reading. Carlyle was not yet twenty-three and he read books rather with the uncritical enthusiasm of a youth, than with the discriminating taste of a man. Nevertheless he was able to interpret literature later on, partly because he read widely in it now. The range of reading is indeed significant. The books that he mentions do not belong to a single class, nor to one literature. He read poetry and mathematics, travel, fiction and philosophy. He was as curious to know French books as English, and he eagerly went through such translations from other languages as came in his way. His curiosity was as insatiable as it was far-ranging. Essential to any critic, broad reading was perhaps doubly essential to Carlyle, whose prepossessions were already beginning to turn his mind into more restricted, if deeper currents of thought. From the Kirkcaldy collection of books he was, as we have seen, more and more likely to select the volumes of serious literature and to reject novels and even poetry, except that of the masters. His casual comments on literature now indicate the gradual emergence of a deeper and more serious spirit.

The full and free outlet for this innate earnestness was already at hand, for Carlyle was about to begin the study of German. Overcome with the miseries of school teaching, which he says "were known long before the second Dionysius,"[51] he left Kirkcaldy for Edinburgh with vague, unformed ambitions. Not many months passed, however, before he had taken up German.[52] A letter written to Mitchell from Edinburgh, February 15, 1819, contains the earliest reference to the study of German to be found in the published writings of Carlyle. He has, he says, just now "no stated duty to perform" except a little attention to mineralogy, "excepting also a slight tincture of German language which I am receiving

[51] *Early Letters*, 84.

[52] Froude's statement leaves the erroneous impression that Carlyle began German in the summer of 1820 while at home on the Mainhill farm (*Life*, I, 72).

from one Robert Jardine of Göttingen (or rather Applegarth), in return for an equally slight tincture of the French which I communicate."[53] Six weeks later (March 29, 1819) Carlyle writes to his brother: "I am still at the German; I am able to read books, now, with a dictionary. At present I am reading a stupid play of Kotzebue's—but tonight I am to have the history of Frederick the Great from Irving. I will make an *awfu' struggle* to read a good deal of it and of the Italian in summer—when at home."[54] Not long after, he refers to "reading a little of Klopstock's *Messias*,"[55] still under the tutorage of Jardine.

Then came the two poets who kindled his enthusiasm and awakened a new intellectual life—Schiller and Goethe. They occupy so large a place in the early literary life of Carlyle, and Goethe alone had so profound an influence upon his spiritual development that it has been easy, apparently, for students to misconstrue the facts concerning his first acquaintance with them. Professor Norton, who did so much valuable service for Carlyle, gives the usual explanation in his introduction to the Goethe-Carlyle correspondence. "Perplexed and baffled," he says, "begirt by doubts," Carlyle "fell in with Madame de Staël's famous book on Germany." From her "he learned to look toward Germany for a spiritual light that he had not found in modern French and English writers."[56] The first reference to Mme. de Staël's book occurs in the *Early Letters*,[57] where Carlyle writes that he has read this work, together with others, and where the context indi-

[53] *Early Letters*, 100.

[54] Regarding this mention of Italian I may add that Froude inaccurately says that Carlyle "had studied Italian and Spanish" (*Life*, I, 105), and "still unsatisfied, he had now fastened himself upon German;" clearly placing both these languages in point of time before German. If Carlyle had any knowledge of Italian before he began German, it must have been slight; for in the passage quoted above as well as in other passages (*Early Letters*, 110, 122), he clearly implies that he was beginning a new language. As for Spanish, he explicitly says that he was "learning Spanish" with his wife at Craigenputtock in the fall of 1828 (*Letters*, 129). Cf. also Japp, *Life of De Quincey*, 209.

[55] *Early Letters*, 111.

[56] *Corresp.*, VIII.

[57] 57; September 25, 1817.

cates that he read it with no more definite purpose than to gratify a curiosity daily growing more acute. At this time Carlyle was not plunged in "severe spiritual wrestlings," such as were to trouble him some years later; and there is no sure suggestion that he went to Mme. de Staël for light, or that she directed him where to find it. Yet the book evidently made a strong impression, for a year and a half later, apropos of another book by the same author, he says of her that "with all her faults she possessed the loftiest soul of any female of her time."[58] In 1822, after some progress in the study of Schiller and Goethe, he refers to "much sublime philosophy in the treatises of Madame de Staël."[59] Again in the same year he writes: "the Miltons, the de Staël's—these *are* the very salt of the Earth."[60] Of these references only the first antedates Carlyle's beginning of German, though the second is in the same letter that tells of the tutoring under Jardine.[61] This notice of Jardine suggests that Carlyle took up German in connection with his study of mineralogy; and a passage in a letter to Goethe, dated November 3, 1829, sustains this view. He there says: "I still remember that it was the desire to read *Werner's* Mineralogical Doctrines in the original, that first set me on studying German; where truly I found a mine, far different from any of the Freyberg ones."[62]

While it is therefore a mistake to suppose that Carlyle had no interest in the German poets before he began to read in their language (he must have read magazine articles upon them, in addition to Mme. de Staël's *Germany*), the facts show that he came to them when he did partly by accident, and certainly not with any definitely formed purpose of seeking "spiritual light." Nevertheless, as the concluding clause in the letter to Goethe tells us, German literature did come to

[58] *Ibid.*, 102. [59] *Ibid.*, 209.

[60] *Ibid.*, 230. Carlyle once thought of translating from the French a *Life of Madame de Staël*, and he refers to a proposed essay on her by Jane Welsh, *ibid.*, 139, 217.

[61] There is no reference to Schiller or Goethe, or to other German literary writers, in the *Early Letters* before 1819.

[62] *Correspondence*, 157. For a much modified opinion on Mme. de Staël's *Germany* see essay on *State of German Literature*, I, 30.

Carlyle as an unlooked for revelation of spiritual truth.[63] And the rapturous outbursts about Schiller and Goethe in early letters add to the weight of this testimony. "I could tell you much about the New Heaven and New Earth which a slight study of German literature has revealed to me." "I have lived riotously with Schiller, Goethe and the rest; they are the greatest men at present with me."[64] Several months later he was urging Miss Welsh to read these authors. "I still entertain a firm trust that you are to read Schiller and Goethe with me in October. I never met with any to relish their beauties; and sympathy is the very soul of life."[65] On the January previous Carlyle informed his brother that he had translated "a portion of Schiller's *History of the Thirty Years' War* and sent it off to Longmans and Company, London,"[66] together with proposals to translate the whole of Schiller.[67] A year later he was at work on the criticism of Faust that appeared in the *New Edinburgh Review* for April, 1822. In 1823–4 the *Life of Schiller* came out in the *London Magazine,* and before this was finished *Wilhelm Meister* was well under way.[68] Thus it was that German unexpectedly opened Carlyle's path to a literary life. It revealed to him, as he said, a new heaven and a new earth, and gave him a gospel to preach to the English people.

But long before he had read Schiller and Goethe, Carlyle had literary ambitions whose beginnings now become important in the present study. Professor Masson tells us that during a walk he once had with Carlyle, he received the impression that Carlyle's passion for literature "came latish" and that his original bent was mathematics; but, says Professor Masson, "I think we are entitled to assume the literary stratum to have been the deeper and more primitive in Carlyle's constitution, and the mathematical vein to have been a

[63] Compare 2 and 34, Goethe-Carlyle *Correspondence.*

[64] Masson, *Edinburgh Sketches,* 283, letters dated August 4 and October 22, 1820.

[65] *Early Letters,* 177.

[66] *Ibid.,* 149.

[67] Masson, *Edinburgh Sketches,* 307.

[68] *Ibid.,* 283.

superposition upon that."[69] The early letters, however, the main source of facts concerning his development during these years, convincingly show that his deepest love was literature and that frequently he "could not help" exchanging "the truths of philosophy for the airy nothings of these sweet singers," as in one place he speaks of forsaking mathematics for Moore and Byron.[70] His general reputation as a mathematician was not the reputation which he held among the few friends who knew him intimately. Among these his real originality and ambitions were recognized, and he was set apart by them for a literary career. This is clearly shown in a letter from Thomas Murray in 1814. "I have had the pleasure of receiving, my dear Carlyle, your very humourous and friendly letter, a letter remarkable for vivacity, a Shandean turn of expression, and an affectionate pathos, which indicate a peculiar turn of mind, make sincerity doubly striking and wit doubly poignant. . . . A happy flow of language either for pathos, description, or humour, and an easy, graceful current of ideas appropriate to every subject, characterize your style. This is not adulation; I speak what I think. Your letters will always be a feast to me, a varied and exquisite repast; and the time, I hope, will come, but I trust is far distant, when these our juvenile epistles will be read and probably applauded by a generation unborn, and that the name of Carlyle, at least, will be inseparably connected with the literary history of the nineteenth century." To which Carlyle replied: "Oh! Tom, what a foolish flattering creature thou art! To talk of future eminence in connection with the literary history of the nineteenth century to such a one as me! Alas, my good lad, when I and all my fancies and speculations shall have been swept over with the besom of oblivion, the literary history of no century will feel itself the worse. Yet think not, because I

[69] *Edinburgh Sketches*, 246–7. The facts of Carlyle's early life support this opinion. Mathematics consumed much of his time in college and for four or five years thereafter; but, as we have seen, he was strongly influenced in his choice of this subject by the superior instruction of Leslie, who appears to have been the only teacher to win Carlyle.

[70] *Early Letters*, 73.

talk thus, I am careless of literary fame. No! Heaven knows that ever since I have been able to form a wish, the wish of being known has been foremost."[71] Such was Carlyle's dream of a literary life, when he was not yet nineteen and had been scarcely a year out of college.

Each succeeding year strengthened his determination to become a literary man. At Kirkcaldy his intimate friends, among whom was the romantic Margaret Gordon, regarded Carlyle as a young man of great promise. Stimulated by such companionship, he longed more and more to enter literature, though never without melancholy misgivings as to his fitness. About this time he had "forwarded to some magazine editor in Edinburgh what, perhaps, was a likelier little article (*i. e.*, than a review of Pictet's *Theory of Gravitation*) (of descriptive tourist kind after a real tour by Yarrow country into Annandale) which also vanished without sign."[72] When he went to Edinburgh in 1818, it was really to try his fortunes in literature;[73] though he was too keenly alive to its uncertainties to trust to it alone. "Mineralogy is to be my winter's work," he writes to Murray, on leaving Kirkcaldy. "I have thought of writing for booksellers. *Risum teneas;* for *at times* I am serious in this matter. In fine weather it does strike me that there are in this head some ideas, a few *disjecta membra,* which might find admittance into some of the many publications of the day. To live by Authorship was never my intention. . . . I have meditated an attempt upon the profession of a lawyer or of a civil engineer."[74] As Carlyle thus stoutly set his face toward the Scottish capital in pursuit of his ideal, his prospects were indeed "not the brightest in nature,"[75] but he had no suspicion that he was about to begin his "four or five most miserable dark, sick, and heavy-laden years."[76]

Because of the misconception that has obtained concerning this critical period in Carlyle's early life, we need to keep the facts accurately before us. He took with him to Edinburgh several introductions to men likely to help him, one of which

[71] Froude, *Life,* I, 29–30.
[72] *Rem.,* II, 235.
[73] *Ibid.,* 232.
[74] *Early Letters,* 87. Cf. *Rem.,* II, 60.
[75] *Early Letters,* 88.
[76] *Rem.,* II, 59.

was to Dr. Brewster, editor of the *Edinburgh Encyclopedia.*[77] A little later he secured a letter to Baillie Waugh, a bookseller about to start the *New Edinburgh Review.*[78] The door to literature, however, did not open at once, and he was compelled to take up other and dreary employments. Irving got him some "private teaching,"[79] which lasted scarcely more than two months and which was followed by mineralogy, "a mournful study."[80] "Every prospect of writing," he says in February, 1819, "up to present date, has been frustrated by my inability to procure books either for criticising or consulting."[81] In the same month came a call from Brewster to translate a French paper on chemistry. "Have it more than half done," he writes home. "Before I began it, I was busied about some other thing; but what will be the upshot of it I cannot say."[82] Nothing, indeed, came of this "other thing," though reference to it is evidence that Carlyle was striving for expression in his original way. On finishing the translation for Brewster in March, he says, "I wish I had plenty more of a similar kind to translate; and good pay for doing it."[83] But there was no more work at hand, and the future looked dark. "My prospects are so unsettled that I do not often sit down to books with all the zeal I am capable of. You are not to think I am fretful."[84] These words are ominous of the deep depression that was fast fixing itself upon Carlyle's mind, a depression greatly aggravated all the while by the tortures of dyspepsia. It was soon after this that he removed his books to Mainhill farm for the summer, where as Froude says, he wandered "about the moors like a restless spirit."[85]

Returning to Edinburgh in the autumn, improved in health and unrelaxed in purpose, he not only continued to look for literary work, but enrolled himself in "the class of Scots

[77] *Early Letters,* 91.
[78] *Ibid.,* 96.
[79] *Ibid.,* 95.
[80] *Ibid.,* 102.
[81] *Ibid.,* 99. Carlyle's independence at this time is shown in his refusal to accept a tutorship because the price offered was not high enough. *Ibid.,* 106.
[82] *Ibid.,* 105.
[83] *Ibid.,* 108.
[84] *Ibid.,* 110.
[85] Froude, *Life,* I, 55.

law"[86] thus signifying his intention to attach himself to a stable profession. But stable professions were never to his taste or habits; and just as he had renounced preaching and teaching, he soon quit the law, finding it "a vast and thorny desert" where there are "uncounted cases of blockhead A *versus* blockhead B."[87] During the winter he searched for literary employment, and ventured an anonymous paper for the *Edinburgh Review*. "I have not been so diligent of late," he tells his mother, December 29, 1819, "on account of a paper I am writing, which I have a design to offer for publication. No one is aware of it, so you need not mention the circumstances; but I can see well enough that to this point my chief efforts should be directed."[88] In March, 1820, he reported himself at work upon articles for Dr. Brewster's *Encyclopedia*, the first instalment of the sixteen short biographical papers beginning with Montaigne and concluding with William Pitt. He sought diligently for further employment, for translating, for any kind of literary work, but without success. Failing to find substantial things to do or any "tongue" for his deepening intellectual life, thinking, in fact, that all avenues were closed against him, Carlyle's mind became a prey to gloom and despondency. "The thought that one's best days are hurrying darkly and uselessly away is yet more grievous [*i. e.*, than solitude]. It is vain to deny it, I am altogether an unprofitable creature. Timid, yet not humble, weak, yet enthusiastic; nature and education have rendered me entirely unfit to force my way among the thick-skinned inhabitants of this planet."[89] This account of his mental condition is followed a few days later by a letter to his brother Aleck, in which he says that he could enjoy the coming of summer if he

[86] *Early Letters*, 119. [87] *Ibid.*, 144.

[88] *Ibid.*, 125. A long letter of advice from Irving to Carlyle (see Froude, *Life*, I, 59) may have been influential in connection with this first effort to gain admission into the pages of the *Edinburgh Review*, Froude's comment is that "Carlyle was less eager to give his thoughts 'tongue' that Irving supposed" (*ibid.*, 62). But the letters of this period show that Irving was correct in regarding Carlyle's mind as made up to earn his living by writing. For Carlyle's allusion to this paper see *Early Letters*, 127, and *Rem.*, II, 233. [89] *Early Letters*, 134–5.

had "some stated job to work to keep" him in employment and to drive away the "vultures of the mind."[90] Thus another winter of "successive fits of activity and low-spirits"[91] wore away, and Carlyle again took down to Mainhill the little work he had to do.

During the following winter (1820–21) his despair dropped to its nadir, and the pictures that he drew of himself became painfully vivid. Not until close upon spring was there a single prospect of additional work, and meanwhile his misery of mind and body made him desperate. "I get low, very low in spirits," he says, "when the clay-house is out of repair." "If you saw me sitting here," he writes to his brother, "with my lean and sallow visage, you would wonder how those long bloodless bony fingers could be made to move at all."[92] A gleam of light breaks in now and then, for in the same letter we read of cheering projects for writing and translating (probably from Schiller). Most of the time, however, the clouds were thick and black. Tortured with bodily pain and without work, Carlyle now experienced a loneliness unfelt before. "To-night," he writes again to his brother (January 2, 1821), "I am *alone* in this cold city—alone to cut my way into the heart of its benefices by the weapons of my own small quiver."[93]

These livid flashes from the clouded correspondence of this period show how stubbornly Carlyle held to his purpose to succeed in literature.[94] Deep in his nature was a consciousness of superior worth and power. "I know there is within me something *different* from the vulgar herd of mortals; I think it is something *superior;* and if once I had overpassed these bogs and brakes and quagmires, that lie between me and the free arena, I shall make some fellows stand to the right and left—or I mistake me greatly."[95] A few weeks later, *i. e.,* March 18, 1821, he relates his fortunes to Mitchell: "I have tried about twenty plans this winter in the way of authorship;

[90] *Ibid.,* 137.
[91] *Ibid.,* 140.
[92] *Ibid.,* 149, 153.
[93] *Ibid.,* 149. Cf. 153, 173.
[94] "If a man taste the magic cup of literature, he must drink of it forever, though bitter ingredients enough be mixed with the liquor." *Ibid.,* 171.
[95] *Ibid.,* 155; to Aleck in February.

they have all failed; I have about twenty more to try; and *if* it does but please the Director of all things to continue the moderate share of health now restored to me, I will make the doors of human society fly open before me yet, notwithstanding my petards will not burst, or make only *noise* when they do; I must mix them better, plant them more judiciously; they *shall* burst and do execution too."[96] But opportunity for literary employment had already brightened the future and had caused him to write cheerfully to his father: "Matters have a more promising appearance with me at the present date than they have had for a long season."[97] Waugh had sent him Joanna Baillie's *Metrical Legends* to review, a task which he executed in the form of an article printed in the *New Edinburgh Review* for October of this year (1821). At the end of May Irving took Carlyle for rest and recreation upon a trip to Haddington, where he first met Jane Welsh. "Those three or four days," he says, "were the beginning of a new life to me."[98]

Thus the storm-clouds blew over and thus happily ended what has correctly been called the darkest period of Carlyle's life. It is in this period that Froude placed the spiritual conflict, the "Baphometic fire-baptism" described in *Sartor*. The biographer says that "the doubts which had stopped Carlyle's divinity career were blackening into thunderclouds,"[99] and that he was passing through the struggle "which is always hardest in the noblest minds, which Job had known, and David, and Solomon, and Æschylus, and Shakespeare, and Goethe."[100] Other biographers, probably echoing Froude, have likened this spiritual revolution to the sudden illumination of Paul[101] and of Constantine.[102] They refer to the *Everlasting No* of *Sartor,* as the authentic record of Carlyle's mental changes at this time; and Froude expressly refers to "the spiritual maladies which were the real cause of his distraction."[103] But the published letters of Carlyle written at this period have no references to such profound spiritual unrest as is thus at-

[96] *Ibid.*, 160.
[97] *Ibid.*, 156.
[98] *Rem.*, II, 87. Cf. *Early Letters*, 169.
[99] *Life*, I, 51.
[100] *Ibid.*, 54.
[101] Garnet, *Life*, 25.
[102] Nichol, *Life*, 32.
[103] *Life*, I, 81.

tributed to him; while they do refer frequently to bodily ailments and to failure to find the right work. It is true that his mind was changing, that he was steadily moving away from the faith of his fathers, and that Schiller and Goethe were revealing a new heaven and a new earth. In Carlyle intellectual advance was inevitable. But it is a mistake to fix upon this period as the crisis of the revolution and to maintain that the chief cause, or any really determining cause, of his distress was a questioning of the truth of revelation or of the existence of a moral Providence in the universe.[104] Long before this time, Gibbon had torn from his mind "the last remnant" of his "orthodox belief in miracles"; [105] and in 1817 he had severed his "last feeble tatter of connection with Divinity Hall," because at that time he "was indifferent on that head."[106] The truth seems to be that lack of work, failure to advance toward the goal of his deepest ambitions and to find expression for the surging life within, were the main sources of Carlyle's harrowing discontent. And the unbroken progress of the next few years add to the evidence that his religious life underwent no convulsive transformation.

Though no new task awaited him on his return to Edinburgh from Haddington, he resumed the old (probably the article on the *Legends* for Waugh and more biographies for Brewster) with a zeal that betokened new hope. "Within the last three weeks," he writes in August, "I have written almost as much

[104] Froude, *Life*, I, 54. [105] Masson, *Edinburgh Sketches*, 263

[106] *Rem.*, II, 39; cf. *ibid.*, 90. The conversion sketched in *Sartor* Carlyle says is "symbolical myth all," with nothing literally true except "the incident in Rue St. Thomas de l'Enfer" (Froude, *Life*, I, 81). By "symbolical myth," I understand Carlyle to mean that the spiritual conflict there described is symbolic of the struggle that all inquiring minds have to endure at some period of their growth, and that he himself passed through in the general course of his early manhood. But conversion in the Pauline sense of change of religious belief, as Froude and others seem to infer, there was none at this time; and if there were any such it came at a later period in the manner described in the *Reminiscences* (II, 179). The incident in *Leith Walk* was a struggle of will, not of belief—a moral wrestle with himself as to whether he would continue the fight to make a living by literature in spite of the nearly overwhelming defeats of the past months.

as I had written before in the whole course of my natural life."[107] "Nervous and spiritless" times there were, as there would always be for Carlyle; but on the whole the succeeding months were passed in joyous industry. In November (1821) Brewster gave him Legendre's *Elements* of geometry and trigonometry to translate, a "canny job" when it was begun, but "thrice wearisome" when nearly finished. Of this task which brought him fifty pounds[108] he writes: "I have set fairly to work, and am proceeding lustily; not in the whimpering, wavering, feeble, hobbling style I used; but stoutly."[109] With the new year (1822) through the friendly help of Irving who was now in London, Carlyle obtained the tutorship of Charles Buller's two sons at a salary of two hundred pounds.[110] He liked the Bullers and continued his teaching for more than two years, finding it "a pleasure rather than a task"; the more more so since it afforded him much time for his literary projects, now multiplying encouragingly. He refused an offer to edit a Dundee newspaper at one hundred pounds a year, and accepted from Waugh a commission to write a paper on *Faust*. He had good reason, therefore, to write; "full of business even to overflowing, with projects of all sorts before me, and some few rational hopes of executing a definite portion of them, I feel very contented in my usual state."[111]

But contentment for Carlyle was never of long duration, and he was the last man to rest satisfied with the hackwork he was now doing. An unrest settled upon him, the unrest of an original mind conscious of its powers but conscious also of its unfruitfulness. For months he had been "riddling creation" for a congenial subject. Back in December, 1821, while working upon *Legendre,* he wrote home: "The evenings I design to devote to original composition, if I could but gather myself."[112] In the next February he said: "I designed to set about writing some Book shortly; and this (at which I must ultimately arrive, if I ever arrive at anything) will of necessity

[107] *Early Letters,* 174.
[108] *Rem.,* II, 106.
[109] *Early Letters,* 186.
[110] *Ibid.,* 190.
[111] *Ibid.,* 206. Cf. 207. "I have plenty of offers from Booksellers."
[112] *Ibid.,* 186.

require to be postponed greatly."[113] "It seems quite indispensable," he told Jane Welsh in May, "that I should make an effort soon; I shall have no settled peace of mind till then."[114] More significant are the words to his mother some weeks later: "I have also books to write and things to say and do in this world which few wot of. This has an air of vanity; but it is not altogether so; I consider that my Almighty Author has given me some glimmerings of superior understanding and mental gifts; and I should reckon it the worst treason against Him to neglect improving and using to the very utmost of my power these His beautiful mercies."[115]

In a study of Carlyle as a critic the character of this first proposed composition has considerable importance, since it discloses the direction of his originality. Earliest projected and longest deliberated was a book on a "historico-biographical"[116] theme, for which he began reading early in 1822,[117] and which he outlined several months later in a letter to Miss Welsh: "Four months ago," he wrote, "I had a splendid plan of treating the history of England during the Commonwealth in a new style—not by way of regular narrative—for which I felt too well my inequality, but by grouping together the most singular manifestations of mind that occurred then under distinct heads—selecting some remarkable person as the representative of each class, and trying to explain and illustrate their excellencies and defects, all that was curious in their fortunes as individuals, or in their formation as members of the human family, by the most striking methods I could devise. Already my characters were fixed upon—Laud, Fox, Clarendon, Cromwell, Milton, Hampden; already I was busied in the study of their works; when that wretched Philomath with his sines and tangents came to put me in mind of a prior engagement."[118] This passage reveals the same essential characteristics in the man of twenty-seven that we find in the man who at sixty-three published his first instalment of the life of Frederick the Great. Unhappily withdrawn from his plans by the

[113] *Ibid.*, 202.
[114] *Ibid.*, 217.
[115] *Ibid.*, 223.
[116] *Ibid.*, 217.
[117] *Note-Books*, 23–29.
[118] *Early Letters*, 260.

call from Brewster for *Legendre,* Carlyle had, nevertheless, no hope of finding "complete rest," until "fairly overhead in the composition of some *valuable* Book."[119] His letters to Miss Welsh during this period constantly refer to literary hopes and aims, all of which were destined to be frustrated for a long time to come. One of his schemes, however, deserves special mention, since it strengthens the impression which we get from the preceding account of the abandoned biographies. "Next I thought of some work of imagination: I would paint, in brief but vivid manner, the old story of a noble mind struggling against an ignoble fate; some fiery yet benignant spirit reaching forth to catch the bright creation of his own fancy, and breaking his head against the vulgar obstacles of this lower world. But then what knew I of this lower world? The man must be a hero, and I could only draw the materials of him for myself. Rich sources of such materials! Besides, it were well that he died of love; and your novel-love is become a perfect drug; and of the genuine sort I could not undertake to say a word."[120]

Fortunately for the world and for Carlyle, he was obliged to give up his scheme of novel-writing in favor of other tasks now rapidly accumulating. Irving opened the way in the *London Magazine* for a life of Schiller; and almost at the same time (early in 1823) "Boyd the pursy Bookseller" wished him to "translate Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister,*" which he had told Boyd was "very clever."[121] But these encouraging prospects, together with the Buller tutorship, served in the end only to intensify his restlessness and to precipitate a second, though a shorter period of despair. It was now "the accursed hag" dyspepsia rather than the want of congenial literary occupation that brought Carlyle to the brink of suicide. Composition, nearly always a harrowing toil with him, became a kind of night-mare.[122] In the midst of such distresses the year

[119] *Ibid.,* 235.

[120] *Ibid.,* 261.

[121] *Ibid.,* 266.

[122] "I sit down to it (*i. e., Meister*) with the ferocity of a hyena" (*ibid.,* 284). "I could frequently swear that I am the greatest dunce in creation; the cooking of a paragraph is little better than the labor of a Goldmaker; I sweat and toil and keep tedious vigil, and at length there runs out from the tortured melting-pot an ingot—of solid pewter" (*ibid.,* 269).

wore on, and the first and second parts of *Schiller* were finished, while not long after (*i. e.*, January, 1824) came from the London *Times* "the *first* public nod of approval" he had ever had.[123] The last of Schiller was soon off his hands, followed speedily by the *Meister*. With a draft of one hundred eighty pounds (the payment for *Meister*) and a letter of introduction to Thomas Campbell, Carlyle sailed, June 5, 1824, from Edinburgh for London to join the Bullers.

This first London visit did not fill him with respect for his fellow-craftsmen, nor did it much improve his chances for success in literature. Irving introduced him to many of the literary celebrities, including Coleridge, the "fattish old man" on Highgate Hill, who mumbled mysteries about "Kant and Co."[124] The first letter from Goethe came at this time, and Carlyle received it with a mixture of sentiment and humor: "Almost like a message from Fairy Land," he tells Miss Welsh.[125] "I was very glad to hear from the old blade, in so kind though so brief a fashion," he tells his brother Aleck.[126] But these flattering attentions did not mean solid pudding and a start on the right road. The Schiller, gathered into book-form, was published in the late winter of 1825 and brought ninety pounds and great disgust to its author, expressed in his refusal to attach his name to the book and in his willingness after he was paid, to "let the thing lie and rot till the day of Doom."[127] To disgust was added momentary wrath when "a luckless wight of an opium-eater," De Quincey, "wrote a very vulgar and brutish Review of *Meister*."[128] By

[123] *Rem.*, II, 114. "I am very weak," he wrote in his note-book; "it kept me cheerful for an hour" (*Note-Books*, 61). How welcome was this ray of light may be judged from a passage in the note-book written a few days before the one just quoted. "My course seems deeper and blacker than that of any man; to be 'immured in a rotten carcass,' every avenue of which is changed into an inlet of pain; till my intellect is obscured and weakened, and my head and heart are alike desolate and dark. How have I deserved this?" (*Note-Books*, 56.)

[124] See original sketch of Coleridge, Froude, *Life*, I, 179. Others whom he met were Campbell, Crabb Robinson, Barry Cornwall.

[125] *Early Letters*, 318.

[126] *Ibid.*, 322.

[127] *Ibid.*, 324.

[128] *Ibid.*, 323.

spring, therefore, Carlyle longed to leave London. "I desire to be *working* honestly in my day and generation in this business which has now become my trade. I make no grain of doubt that in time I shall penetrate the fence that keeps me back, and find the place which is due to me among my fellow-men. We shall see: I am not at all in a hurry; the time will come."[129]

The time was almost at hand. During the succeeding period at Hoddam Hill (the summer of 1825), "perhaps the most triumphantly important of my life,"[130] Carlyle was not only busy translating his *Specimens of German Romance* (for which he had contracted before leaving London); but he was also again feverishly eager to produce an original work. "Alas! the matter lies deep and crude, if it lies at all, within my soul; and much unwearied study will be called for before I can shape it into form. Yet out it shall come, by all the powers of Dulness."[131] The project of a literary newspaper[132] and a proposal to secure the editorship of the *Scots' Magazine*—left a wreck from the failure of the Ballantynes—were alike rejected. In the autumn of 1826 he married Jane Welsh and removed to Edinburgh, where the spectres of unrest still haunted him and the wish to begin "some book of my own" became a kind of demonic possession.[133] He did in fact start a novel, the plan of which he had sketched four or five years previously. "Heaven only knows what it will turn to; but I have sworn to finish it," he wrote.[134] But *Wotton Reinfred* (such was the book's name), though daily on the anvil, refused to be hammered into right shape and had to be set aside for a "new enterprise."[135] This came as the result of a visit to Jeffrey. From Barry Cornwall Carlyle had obtained a letter of introduction to the great man, who received him "in his kindest style,"[136] offered to introduce him to Scott, and "spoke about writing in his *Review*."[137] Carlyle asked Jeffrey to read the

[129] *Ibid.*, 326.
[130] *Rem.*, II, 179.
[131] *Early Letters*, 339.
[132] *Ibid.*, 343.
[133] For various schemes of original writing see *Note-Books*, 77–80, and 119–120.
[134] *Letters*, 20.
[135] *Ibid.*, 46.
[136] *Ibid.*, 22.
[137] *Ibid.*, 23.

German Romance first, to see what manner of man he was, after which he would call again. Some months later accordingly he did call. "Where is the Article? seemed to be the gist of Jeffrey's talk to me; for he was to all appearance anxious that I would undertake the task of Germanizing the public—so I did not treat the whole Earth not yet Germanized as a 'parcel of blockheads'; which surely seemed a fair enough request. Two days after, having revolved the thing, I met him again, with the notice that I would 'undertake.' The next number of the *Review,* it appeared, was actually in the press, and to be printed off before the end of June; so that no large Article could find place there, till the succeeding quarter. However, I engaged, as it were for paving the way, to give him in this present publication some little short paper; I think on the subject of Jean Paul, though that is not quite settled with myself yet."[138] Recalling this circumstance many years later, Carlyle had this to say of it: "I was now in a sort fairly launched upon Literature; and had even, to sections of the public, become a 'Mystic School';—not quite prematurely, being now the age of thirty-two, and having had my bits of experience, and gotten something which I wished much to say,—and have ever since been saying, the best way I could."[139]

[138] *Ibid.*, 46.

[139] *Rem.*, II, 237.

CHAPTER II

Ideals of Literature

Our study of Carlyle's early life, with especial reference to his efforts to enter the field of literature, has brought to light certain important prepossessions. Environment, education, and early struggles combined to develop a Scottish nature hardly matched in its union of intellectual power with moral intensity. To whatever task he turned, Carlyle was almost sure to bring to the execution of it an earnestness so vehement as to determine the direction of his intellectual energies. He loved literature from the first and he read it widely and insatiably; but his liking for the literature of pleasure soon gave place to a preference which in later days amounted to a prejudice for the literature of edification. It was the consuming ambition of his early manhood to write an original work, which was certain to be ethical in its purpose, whether it took the form of novel, verse or essay. This original bias of mind deeply influenced Carlyle's literary and critical ideals. He always favored literature that carried with it an ethical or a spiritual content, and he was likely to be deficient in sympathy with a man or a book that did not arouse his moral nature.

It was more from necessity than from deliberate intention that Carlyle became for a period of years a critic of literature. By long meditation and by intense study of German literature and philosophy, he had formulated a gospel which he wished to preach to the English people. Had he been free to choose his own time and method, undoubtedly Carlyle would not have selected the review article, or the critical essay, as the medium of his message. Necessity left him no alternative. But into compositions which were written to meet the needs of the hour, he poured so much of his heart and mind that they have survived to this day with scarcely diminished vitality and remain as a notable achievement in English literary criticism. The message that he learned from literature and philosophy he

communicated in the form of a philosophical criticism of literature. In all of his essays, therefore, from first to last, there will be found a consistent body of literary and critical doctrine, which received an emphasis varying with the time when it was expressed and with the author to whom it was applied. It is the purpose of the present study to expound this doctrine, or body of literary and critical ideals. We shall first consider their nature and source, and their relation to contemporary criticism. We shall next show how these ideals determined Carlyle's attitude toward the literature of romanticism. These larger and more general aspects of the subject will be followed by some account of Carlyle's place as an introducer of German literature into England and by an exposition of five or six of his greater essays to show how he applied his principles to the interpretation of individual authors. Finally, we shall point out his change from criticism to prophecy and shall have a brief word to say concerning his strength and weakness as a critic of literature.

Carlyle once declared that "all real 'Art' is definable as Fact, or say as the disimprisoned 'Soul of Fact.'"[1] Though he made this declaration in 1867, it expresses a faith which he held from the beginning of his literary career. Fact is synonymous with truth, or, as he says in *Sartor,* it is eternity looking through time. It is the function of art to reveal this truth. "We cannot but believe," says Carlyle, "that there is an inward and essential Truth in Art; a Truth far deeper than the dictates of mere Mode, and which, could we pierce through these dictates, would be true for all nations and all men. To arrive at this Truth, distant from every one at first, approachable by most, attainable by some small number, is the end and aim of all real study of Poetry."[2] All poetry, or literature

[1] *Essays,* VII, 220.

[2] *Essays,* I, 199. In Carlyle's essays the word art is used in three senses. First, as in the above passages, it means organized truth, seen and shaped in the mind's deepest recesses; this is the usual meaning (Essays, II, 24; IV, 123). Secondly, it is used as synonymous with form, as referring to what are called "literary merits and demerits:" this use is not infrequent in the earlier essays (*Essays,* IV, 47). Thirdly, art is used to mean fine art, sculpture, music, or poetry; this use is rare even in the earlier essays (*Essays,* II, 275).

(the terms are synonymous in Carlyle), is an apocalypse of man and of nature. "It may well enough be named, in Fichte's style, a 'continuous revelation' of the Godlike in the Terrestrial and Common." Poetry is thus identified with philosophy, with wisdom, with religion. Its aim is to incorporate "the everlasting Reason of man in forms visible to his Sense." The true poet is both a philosopher and a seer. Goethe is not a mere poet and sweet singer, but a "Moralist and Philosopher." In Richter "Philosophy and Poetry are blended." Novalis is philosopher as well as poet, because he strives to reveal the unseen. For a contrary reason Voltaire is only "a popular sweet Singer and Haranguer."[3] But whether Carlyle calls the literary artist a poet or a philosopher, he invariably thinks of him as a seer and not as a maker of abstract systems of thought. Even when he goes so far in his essay on German playwrights as to declare that "a consistent philosophy of life is the soul and essence of all poetry," he means only that the poet should consistently and habitually deal with realities, not with fancies, with what has been lived, not with what has been dreamed. Literature is concerned with truth.[4]

[3] *Heroes,* 151; *Essays,* I, 221; II, 49; I, 198; III, 4; II, 162.

[4] *Essays,* II, 114. The meaning of the word reality in Carlyle, or its equivalent, such as truth, fact, art, life seems to shift somewhat as his interest changes from literature and criticism to biography and prophecy. In the earlier essays these terms generally have an exact reference to the German critical philosophy and mean something transcendental, while in the later ones reality seems to mean only what has been *lived,* that is, truth which has passed through human experience. But even this Carlyle regards as transcendental in the general sense.

The identification of poetry and philosophy was common among the romantic writers both in Germany and England. It was the aim everywhere to make poetry synonymous with life in its totality, the essence of social, ethical, religious and philosophical thought. To this effect Professor Boyesen quotes from Friedrich Schlegel's manifesto in the second number of *The Athenæum,* the organ of the Romantic School in Germany. (*Essays on German Literature,* 289.) The writings of Richter and Novalis are full of this notion. The criticism of Wordsworth, Coleridge and Hazlitt frequently includes it (*Wordsworth's Literary Criticism,* ed. Nicol, 25, 27, 165, 171; *Coleridge's Literary Criticism,* ed. Mackail, 173, 183; Hazlitt, *Works,* V, *On Poetry in General, passim,* esp. 2, 6). It is in DeQuincey and Shelley. See also Herford's *Age of Wordsworth, Intro.,* XV.

Carlyle sometimes identifies this truth in art with beauty, but not by entering the mazes of æsthetic theory as do Schiller and Goethe,[5] nor by believing, with Keats that "what the imagination seizes as Beauty must be Truth."[6] To delicately spun systems or formulas he was opposed. And we cannot think of him as seeking truth in art through the senses. Truth comes to us intuitively, by a synthesis of the reason. It is, as Wordsworth also held, a product of the creative imagination. This higher truth, originating from within, Carlyle often speaks of as beauty. We find him referring to a "universal and eternal Beauty," and defining taste as a "sense to discern and a heart to love and reverence all beauty, order, goodness."[7] Criticism, he says, pretends to "clear our sense" to discern "Eternal Beauty." Under the influence of Goethe's poetry, the world once more has become a solemn temple "where the spirit of Beauty still dwells."[8] The open secret is no longer a secret to the poet; he knows that the universe is full of goodness and that "whatever has being has beauty." A "wizard beauty," Carlyle says, dwells in the fragments of Novalis, but in the art of Hoffmann there is none.[9] Whereever it is named, beauty is thought of as the creation, not of a mind working from without among sensations, but of one working from within among ideas. Beauty is therefore indistinguishable from transcendental truth and has the same spiritual value.[10]

It is an integral part of this doctrine that poetry and prose are the same, and that meter is an ornament not a necessity of poetry.[11] Carlyle is not deaf to the melody and harmony in

[5] *Note-Books*, 36–41.

[6] Keats, *Works*, IV, 46.

[7] *Essays*, I, 34; cf. *ibid.*, 47.

[8] *Essays*, I, 44, 55.

[9] *Essays*, I, 195, 230, 260; III, 162.

[10] Carlyle is a mystic in his use of such concepts as truth, beauty, goodness. In the earlier essays these terms are used interchangeably, and the soul of the universe is at once good and beautiful and true. Later and especially when the word beauty seemed to suggest dilettantism and fine arts, he generally employed the term truth (or reality) alone. Another instance of his mysticism is in his treatment of poetry as "musical thought" (*Heroes*, 77; cf. also the phrase "Music of the Universe," *Essays*, IV, 183). Shakespeare "is a Voice coming to us from the Land of Melody" (*Essays*, I, 212; cf. Shelley's phrase "Eternal music," *Defense of Poetry*, 9).

[11] *Essays*, II, 107.

the song of the poet (no critic has given higher or juster praise to the songs of Burns), but he thinks that the music comes from an expression of "Musical Thought."[12] He does not attribute it to the poet's mastery of measured language. In but a single instance does he use the name poetry when referring to Scott's poems.[13] He usually speaks of them as rhymed or metrical romances and of Scott as a song-singer; making it appear on all sides that he does not consider Scott a poet in the sense in which the word is used in his criticism. Voltaire, the representative poet of the eighteenth century in France, is not a poet but a prosaist.[14] The dramas of Grillparzer, though written in verse, are not poetry; and Grillparzer is not a dramatist, but only a playwright who "writes in prose."[15] Writing that fails to carry truth to the reader is not poetry, whatever its form. Writing that conveys truth is poetry, whether its language is metrical or unmetrical. Carlyle therefore regards Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* and Boswell's *Life of Johnson* as poetry.[16] Richter, who wrote no verse, is yet a "Poet."[17] The "prose fictions" of Novalis are poetry, and passages from *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* illustrate him "in his character of Poet."[18] The true artist may use what speech he will; but his position as poet is determined by the worth of his message.[19]

The theory that the sole function of poetry is to reveal truth or beauty carries with it the notion that the poet is a seer.

[12] *Heroes*, 77–78.

[13] *Essays*, VI, 55.

[14] The discussion in *Essays*, II, 167–170 is really not an exception to this assertion.

[15] *Essays*, II, 91; cf. II, 107.

[16] *Essays*, I, 194–6; IV, 78, 81, 109.

[17] *Essays*, III, 59; cf. Heine: "Jean Paul ist ein grosser Dichter und Philosoph" (*Werke*, V, 330).

[18] *Essays*, II, 220.

[19] In the deliverance of his message, that is, in the choice of his material, the poet is not limited to one class of subjects or persons. Reality may be found in the meanest places or among the humblest people. The essay on Burns may be regarded from one point of view as a defense (against the apologists of the school of Jeffrey) of humble material as proper for poetic treatment (*Essays*, II, 13–15; I, 17).

Carlyle's doctrine implies all along that true literature is serious and that the literature of amusement is not literature in the legitimate sense (*Essays*, I, 47, 282; II, 98, 142, 184; III, 89; VI, 70).

This notion fills so large a place in Carlyle's literary creed that we must discuss it here, even though it was touched upon in a previous paragraph. A seer is an artist with the gift of vision, an artist, as Carlyle says in *Goethe,* "in the high and ancient meaning; in the meaning which it may have borne long ago among the masters of Italian painting, and the fathers of Poetry in England; [in whom] we trace some touches of that old, divine Spirit."[20] "The true Poet," he says again, "is ever, as of old, the Seer; whose eye has been gifted to discern the godlike Mystery of God's Universe, and decipher some new lines of its celestial writing; we can still call him a *Vates* and Seer; for he *sees* into this greatest of secrets, 'the open secret'; hidden things become clear; how the Future (both resting on Eternity) is but another phasis of the Present: thereby are his words in very truth prophetic; what he has spoken shall be done."[21] Like the poet, the man of letters also is a revealer of inner and essential truth, and Carlyle applies to him Fichte's characterization: "Men of letters are a perpetual Priesthood, from age to age, teaching all men that a God is still present in this life; that all 'appearance,' whatsoever we see in the world, is but a vesture for the 'Divine Idea of the World,' for that which 'lies at the bottom of appearance.'"[22] This power to *see* truth furnishes the criterion by which Carlyle estimates the worth and rank of every writer whom he seriously considers, from Musæus to Scott.

This faculty of vision, as Carlyle conceives it, is the supreme gift. It means, in the first place, that its possessor is a thinker, not a dreamer. "At bottom, it is the Poet's first gift," he says, "as it is all men's, that he have intellect enough."[23] "True

[20] *Essays,* I, 180. [21] *Essays,* IV, 44.

[22] *Heroes,* 145. Cf. the discussion on poets and poetry in *Wotton Reinfred, Last Words,* 128–145. This lofty idea of the poet's nature and office was common to early romanticism, especially in Germany. Professor Boyesen says: "This exaltation of the poet above the rest of his kind, this assumption of the office of a prophet, priest and inspired seer, and the kindred claims to exemption from the rules of morals which govern ordinary men, are dominant features in the Romantic School." *Essays on Ger. Lit.,* 328. [23] *Heroes,* 97.

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poetry is always the quintessence of general mental riches, the purified result of strong thought and conception, and of refined as well as powerful emotion."[24] He calls particular attention to Shakespeare's "superiority of Intellect," and to Goethe's "all-piercing faculty of Vision."[25] By intellect Carlyle did not mean, as did many English critics of his day, some individual faculty or power working as it were in isolation to produce a pretty fancy or sentiment. He meant the entire mind, as a single intellectual force, with all its faculties acting in concert to create artistic wholes. Goethe's poetry, he says, is the voice of the whole harmonious manhood.[26] When he speaks of morality in a poet, or of moral purpose in a poem, therefore, Carlyle is never thinking of something detached and apart. Art is moral because intellect and morality are indistinguishable in the sound mind.[27] Art is indeed the creation of the poet's whole mind in its moments of clearest vision, but it is at precisely those moments that the mind is most moral.[28]

This faculty of insight, or vision, means in the second place, that the poet or thinker works by processes mysterious and incommunicable. Carlyle's notion of artistic creation is carefully formulated and harmonizes with his entire philosophical theory of poetry. The best and fullest statement of it occurs in the essay called *Characteristics*:

> "Of our Thinking," he declares, "we might say, it is but the mere upper surface that we shape into articulate Thoughts;—underneath the region of argument and conscious discourse, lies the region of meditation; here, in its quiet mysterious depths, dwells what vital force is in us; here, if aught is to be created, and not merely manufactured and communicated, must the work go on. Manufacture is intelligible, but trivial; Creation is great, and cannot be understood. Thus if the Debator and Demonstrator, whom we may rank as the lowest of true thinkers, knows what he has done, and how he did it, the Artist, whom we rank as the highest, knows not; must speak of Inspiration, and in one or the other dialect, call his work the gift of a divinity."[29]

[24] *Life of Schiller*, 169. [25] *Heroes*, 98; *Essays*, IV, 178.

[26] *Essays*, I, 180; II, 18; *Heroes*, 98, 73.

[27] *Life of Schiller*, 171; *Heroes*, 41, 99; *Lectures on the History of Literature*, 150.

[28] *Essays*, I, 56, 180; II, 19, 51; IV, 20, 48.

[29] *Essays*, IV, 4.

To this clear and strong declaration we need supply but a single comment. We may add that the distinction made between manufacture and creation is fundamental in Carlyle's criticism underlying all that he has to say concerning the difference between the prosaist and the poet. In the essay on German playwrights for example, he again and again distinguishes the dramatist who is a creator, and therefore a poet, from the playwright who is a manufacturer, a mechanician, and therefore a prosaist.[30] The same standards are applied to Voltaire, whose world is called prosaic and whose order is not "Beauty, but, at best, Regularity."[31] The manufacturer works by means of "a knack, or trick of the trade" and manages consciously to construct what at best is but a semblance of art. The artist creates unconsciously, for he discovers truth by a process wholly transcending the process of logic. "Shakespeare's Art," says Carlyle, "is not Artifice; the noblest worth of it is not there by plan or contrivance."[32] Unlike Scott, who is a fashioner and not a creator, Shakespeare and Goethe create their characters "from the heart outwards."[33] Faust is emphatically a work of art, "matured in the mysterious depths of a vast and wonderful mind."[34] "Boswell's grand intellectual talent was, as such ever is, an unconscious one."[35] The manufacturer works with his understanding, but the creative artist is endowed with reason, that divine faculty, by which, according to the post-Kantians and the younger German romanticists, the poet and the thinker can penetrate to the heart of truth.

But it is not to the content of art alone that Carlyle's theory of creation applies. It includes form and the relation of form to content. Form, he holds, has a subjective origin and should be judged finally by a standard from within; nothing in art is determined from without by established or conventional rules. "Genius has privileges of its own, it selects an orbit for itself." It is limited to one rule, that of seeing truth, of discovering meanings. The appropriate form will follow, the artist will not know how, and it is "to be judged by the inward qualities

[30] *Essays*, II, 88–107.
[31] *Essays*, II, 165; cf. 281.
[32] *Heroes*, 100.
[33] *Essays*, VI, 69.
[34] *Essays*, I, 131.
[35] *Essays*, IV, 78.

of the Spirit which it is employed to body forth." "The *word* that he speaks is the *man* himself." "There is no uniform of excellence," says Carlyle, "all Genuine things are what they ought to be."[36] Again, therefore, Carlyle returns to an ethical standard. "In poetry," he says, "we have heard of no secret possessing the smallest effectual virtue, except this one general secret; that the poet is a man of a purer, higher, richer nature than other men; which higher nature shall itself, after earnest inquiry, have taught him the proper form for embodying its inspirations, as indeed the imperishable beauty of these will shine, with more or less distinctness, through any form whatever."[37] The process of artistic creation, whether we speak of form or of content, or of both, thus integrates with Carlyle's theory of poetry. The object of the poet is truth. He discovers it by his faculty of vision or insight. He bodies it forth by means of the creative process. This process—itself a product of the highest intellectual culture—works mysteriously within the innermost recesses of the mind, where it weaves the appropriate garment for the truth which has been revealed.[38]

Now that we have before us the principles underlying Carlyle's ideals of literature, it is proper to say something of their source. The doctrine thus far presented is a coherent one, but it is not original. Much of it may be paralleled in Aristotle, in Horace, and in the critics of the Italian Renaissance.[39] The idea of poetry as a higher philosophy, the idea that it depends for its vitality upon thought rather than upon form and that meter is not an essential and distinguishing characteristic, and the regard for poetry chiefly as an interpretation of life and a guide to conduct, these are ideas which were taught and believed hundreds of years before Carlyle gave expression to them. But there is no evidence that he was directly indebted

[36] *Essays*, I, 16–17, 128; IV, 62–63, 87; *Heroes*, 96–97.

[37] *Essays*, II, 115.

[38] Brandes points out that A. W. Schlegel learned from Goethe "that perfect technique has an inward origin" (*Main Currents*, II, 53). Coleridge says that "organic form is innate" (*Literary Criticism*, 186).

[39] Cf. Spingarn, *Literary Criticism in the Renaissance*, II.

to critics and thinkers of a former age. His literary creed has a much later parentage. It owes its origin to romanticism and to some of the sources from which romanticism itself sprang. In its attitude of revolt from neo-classical standards, in its glorification of poets and poetry, in its declaration that genius has a right to choose its own path, Carlyle's romanticism expresses a general agreement with the new literary movements of the nineteenth century. It differs widely from much of the romanticism in England (that of Scott and Keats for examples) in that it rests upon definite doctrines which go back to the transcendental philosophy of Germany.[40] But it has much in common with romanticism in Germany, because romanticism began among the Germans as an organized movement, established upon principles derived mainly from Kant and from the writings of Schiller and Goethe. The original sources of Carlyle's doctrine, therefore, take us back to the transcendental philosophy.

The German literature of his day, says Carlyle, owes its inspiration to the critical philosophy created by Kant and developed by Fichte and Schelling. "Such men as Goethe and Schiller," he says, "cannot exist without effect in any literature or in any century; but if one circumstance more than another has contributed to forward their endeavors, and introduce that higher tone into the literature of Germany, it has been this philosophical system."[41] The fullest interpretations of this system to be found in the essays are in *The State of German Literature* and in *Novalis*. Its general outlines are well known. It is opposed to the sensational philosophy of Locke and to the skeptical philosophy of Hume, because, as Carlyle says, it "commences from within."[42] Space and time are forms and matter has no real existence. The visible world is but a

[40] Where Carlyle's ideals correspond with these of Wordsworth and Coleridge, a common origin may be found in German philosophy and literature. Carlyle had a low opinion of Coleridge as a thinker, but he certainly had read the *Biographia Literaria* (*e. g.*, II, 184), and he must have profited by Coleridge's criticism (*e. g., Heroes,* 84); though I can find no indications of direct indebtedness. There are also some interesting correspondences between Shelley's theories and Carlyle's.

[41] *Essays,* I, 66; IV, 36. [42] *Essays,* I, 67.

shadow of the eternal mind. The universe is therefore spiritual through and through. God and man are the only realities. Even the individual ego is only a light-sparkle floating on the ether of deity. Truth, reality or fact (it matters not which term we use) is apprehended by man intuitively, that is, by the "inward eye" of reason, the mind's supreme faculty; whereas all practical and material knowledge," such as comes within the ken of logic, is the product of the understanding, a useful but a lower organ of the intellect. In this transcendentalism there is a mystical or poetical mingling of the systems of Kant, Fichte and Schelling.[43] The terms reason and understanding, used so frequently by Carlyle in his criticism, are Kantian in origin, but the meaning which they carry in the essays is definitely Fichtean.[44] The notion of literature as a revelation of the divine idea, and of the poet as a seer, is also Fichtean.[45] From Fichte is derived the theory of artistic creation as an unconscious process. Since space and time are forms, "Deity is ommipresent and eternal"[46] and apprehended by reason working in its own mystical manner—a statement of Fichte's doctrine of the infinite self. Trace Carlyle's speculations where we will, we are certain to emerge upon a path that leads straight to the transcendental philosophy. The thinker of Craigenputtock lived in a shadow-world far more real to him than the gray moors which surrounded his solitary home.

[43] Carlyle probably never read Kant's *Critique* through (*Note-Books*, 119), but he read about Kant on all sides. He quotes from Fichte's *Über das Wesen des Gelehrten* (*Essays*, I, 50) and he refers to Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* (*Essays*, II, 201, 204). Schelling is rarely referred to (*Essays*, I, 71; *Heroes*, 75). Carlyle freely used the Kantian terms reason and understanding, but, as regards reason, not in a strictly Kantian sense. Kant never denied the existence of matter and he remained a realist. Carlyle's thinking for the most part is identical with the subjective idealism of Fichte (*i. e.*, he is all in all a Fichtean; our me is the only reality, and nature is but the reflex of our own inward force; *Sartor*, I, 8, 9, 10). Sometimes he interprets the world in terms of Schelling's objective idealism, as when he says that the universe is "the realized Thought of God." *Heroes*, 75.

[44] Reason in Carlyle's criticism is about equivalent to imagination in Hazlitt's and Coleridge's.

[45] *Essays*, I, 50–52.

[46] *Essays*, II, 205.

But Carlyle's debt to Schiller, to Goethe and to the German romanticists was also very great. We should not be exceeding the truth if we said that he borrowed his ideas concerning the nature and function of poetry first from the poets, and afterward traced such as were fundamental back to the philosophers. It is not, however, the purpose of this study to explore minutely the wide field from which Carlyle gathered his ideas. These ideas, strewn broadcast everywhere, acted as a powerful fertilizing influence; and no important mind in German literature at that period came to fruition without receiving from them a quickening impulse. We shall therefore be content here to point out but a few of the literary origins, such as are unquestionable and easy of access in the essays themselves, and leave others to be referred to in later chapters as occasion requires.

The ideals of modern German poetry, as Carlyle interpreted them in his essay on *The State of German Literature,* are practically identical with those which we have set forth in the preceding pages. The passage which he quotes from Schiller's *Letters on the Æsthetic Education of Man* is notable.[47] A few sentences from this will illustrate the close correspondence between Schiller's doctrine and Carlyle's.

> After an artist has grown to manhood under a distant Grecian sky, says Schiller, let him return into his century, "not, however, to delight it by his presence; but terrible, like the Son of Agamemnon, to purify it. The matter of his works he will take from the present; but their Form he will derive from a nobler time, nay from beyond all time, from the absolute unchanging unity of his nature. . . ." Let the artist "leave to mere Understanding, which is here at home, the province of the actual; while *he* strives, by uniting the possible with the necessary, to produce the ideal."[48]

If to these sentences we add still others from *The Life of Schiller* (175–176), wherein Carlyle interprets the poet's ideas concerning the nature and function of literature, we may see that Carlyle must have received both ideas and inspiration from Schiller. The huge array of definitions and technical terms in Schiller's writings on æsthetics repelled Carlyle; but in certain

[47] Carlyle quotes the passage twice elsewhere, either in part or as a whole (*Life of Schiller,* 176; *Essays,* III, 94).

[48] *Essays,* I, 48.

fundamental articles, such as the transcendental origin of poetry and the exalted idea of the purpose of literature and of the character of the poet, he believed as devoutly as did Schiller.

Important as was Schiller's influence it is hardly to be compared with that which Goethe exerted, for Goethe was to Carlyle the highest representative of modern poetry and unlike Schiller, a poet born, not made. He was the *complete* man—poet, philosopher, teacher. The book of Goethe's to which Carlyle owed most is beyond a doubt *Wilhelm Meister.* The opinions on art and conduct interwoven into this work were for him the bread of life. "I have not got as many ideas from any book for six years," he wrote to Jane Welsh in 1824.[49] Wherever, in his writings, he speaks intimately of it, there is something of reverence in his words. From the *Apprenticeship* Carlyle learned that it should be the purpose of poetry to express the universal and the ideal, and that these should be found in the conditional world in which we live, not above it or under it. He learned that art should deal with wholes, that poetry and prose are not at variance, and that the poet is a sacred character, "a teacher, a prophet, a friend of gods and men."[50] The second part of *Wilhelm Meister, The Travels,* moved Carlyle's spirit more deeply than did the *Apprenticeship,* but it could scarcely have taught him more of art or life. It contains, however, the kernel of his doctrine, and in a letter to Goethe he speaks of it as "an embodiment of all that is finest in the Philosophy of Art and Life," and he says it "has almost assumed the aspect of perfection in his thoughts."[51] From the essential teachings of these two parts of *Wilhelm Meister* Carlyle never departed. He found Goethe's transcendentalism more congenial to his nature than he did Schiller's; for Goethe's ideas concerning literary art grew up from the rich soil of his own experience. He lived, so Carlyle thought, under the guidance of reason, not of passion; and his mind, in unity with itself, dwelt serenely within the realm of "the Whole, the

[49] Froude, *Life,* I, 171. [50] *Essays,* I, 194–197.

[51] *Corres.,* 66. For art theories in *The Travels* see Carlyle's translation, III, 123–131.

Good, and the True."[52] Though these ideals received an ungoethean emphasis from Carlyle as time went on, they remained the animating heart of his message, alike on poetry, on history and on society.[53]

Next to Goethe and Schiller the German authors who most influenced Carlyle were Richter and Novalis. It was, however, chiefly as literary interpreters of the critical philosophy that they had any appreciable influence upon his ideals of literature. In Richter he discovered a transcendentalist to whom nature was "a mysterious Presence." Richter was not a novelist, at least in the usual sense, but "a Philosopher and Moral Poet." He was a mystic who clothed "his wild wayward dreams, allegories and shadowy imaginings" in a style extravagant, metaphorical, complex and abounding in humor. He was Carlyle's brother Titan, preaching in a similar dialect against a skeptical and mechanical age.[54] Jean Paul was the forerunner of another mystic, Novalis, who, as Professor Royce says, was "the true romantic interpreter of Fichte's doctrine." For a time at least Carlyle was much moved by the singular productions from the pen of this young dreamer. His various and extended quotations from the writings of Novalis, whether on poetry or philosophy, art or conduct, imply a large spiritual indebtedness. Novalis is the typical German mystic, the man steeped in Kantian metaphysics, who has in him "an unfathomed mine of philosophical ideas" and who regards the visible world only as a manifestation of deity.[55] In so far as ideas are concerned, therefore, Novalis, like Richter, was for

[52] *Essays,* I, 279; IV, 50.

[53] A Spinozist rather than a Kantist, Goethe was all the more a believer in the transcendental origin of poetry, and in the unconscious process of poetic creation (cf. *Meister,* II, 188). He believed also in the essential oneness of the beautiful and the true, with which "the morally good is inseparably connected" (Bielschowsky, *Life of Goethe,* II, 392. For an interpretation of Goethe's ideas see also II, 161–2, 327, 391–2; III, 31–34, 51, 56, 61, 100–101). Sayings on art paralleling Carlyle's are abundant in *Dichtung und Wahrheit* and in the *Gespräche.*

[54] *Essays,* I, 8, 13; cf. II, 268–275. The humor and style of Richter were considerable influences upon Carlyle, but with these we are not here concerned.

[55] *Essays,* II, 226, 206.

Carlyle rather an inspiring interpreter of other men's doctrines than a teacher of his own. Both these German romanticists immensely stimulated Carlyle, because they clothed their messages in a language that strongly appealed to his delight in humor and his love of the mystical; but they did not furnish him with ideas that he could not have found in the writings either of Goethe and Schiller or of the philosophers.

Like the theories of Novalis, of Friedrich Schlegel and other German romanticists, those of Carlyle not only had their roots in the transcendental philosophy, but they grew and expanded until they embraced nearly every significant expression of the human spirit. Literature was regarded not as a manifestation of a phase of man's activities merely, but as the quintessence of the soul's life everywhere. Poetry, said the romanticists, is life; poetry, said Carlyle, is the vital spirit of histories, constitutions, and creeds, as well as of epics and philosophies. Whatever voices the soul of humanity, that is poetry. The significance of this belief, in connection with a study of Carlyle's mind, can scarcely be exaggerated; for in his ideas concerning the relation of poets and poetry to society, his originality first finds expression, his independent moral convictions first rise to the surface. He drew freely upon Goethe and the romanticists for the social aspects of his poetical theories, but he did not develop these theories in the direction of the neoclassicism or symbolism of the later Goethe, nor did he sympathize with the voluptuous and sensual dreams, the religious vagaries and other fantastic excesses, into which Novalis and his brethren of the new school finally descended. Rather, we hear more and more often the native Scotch voice and we feel the impulse of the rigorous puritan prophet. We are drawn into a current of thought that ultimately carries us away from literature into hero-worship and prophecy.

Among the various ideas which imply the social side of Carlyle's poetic theory, perhaps the most inclusive is one that Goethe impressed upon him, namely, the universality of the poet's mind. The poet is the embodiment of the highest intellectual achievements of the race. He is the oracle of the eternal longings and strivings of common humanity. In him, says

Carlyle, we see "a freer, purer development of whatever is noblest in ourselves."[56] Poetry is therefore universal in its nature and its appeal. Goethe often sought to impress Carlyle with its cosmopolitan character. "It is obvious," he writes, "that the efforts of the best poets and æsthetic writers have now for some time been directed towards what is universal in humanity." "What is truly excellent," he adds, "is distinguished by its belonging to all mankind." To which Carlyle replies that these doctrines, so far as he has seized their full import, "command his entire assent." Goethe also impressed him with a sense of the great importance of a commerce of ideas between nations, and he seized every opportunity to preach to Carlyle the lesson that art is a matter of international concern.[57] Carlyle was prompt to take up and apply this teaching. For a decade and longer, when literary England was more than usually insular in its spirit and when its attitude of moral and intellectual superiority was unwarrantably offensive, Carlyle defiantly asserted that art is independent of mode and true for all nations and all men. It was no longer possible, he urged, for a people to live exclusively within the narrow realm of their own ideas; and he therefore welcomed the inpouring of ideas from Germany, since this would mean a comparison of "English with foreign judgment" and a renewal of intercourse and revival of intellectual life among civilized peoples.[58] Carlyle ardently advocated these notions, because he believed that art is universal, the message of the Time-Spirit to men.

Mention of the Time-Spirit suggests a second phase of Carlyle's doctrines concerning the relation of literature to society. He learned from Fichte that "each age, by the law of its nature, is different from every other age, and demands a different representation of the Divine Idea, the essence of which is the same in all."[59] He quotes Schiller to the effect that the medium of the poet's truth must come from his own age;[60] and the text of Goethe's greatest sermon was that the

[56] *Essays*, II, 6; cf. *Essays*, I, 212, 281.
[57] *Corres.*, 24–25, 33.
[58] *Essays*, I, 179, 199, 200, 282; III, 221.
[59] *Essays*, I, 50. [60] *Essays*, I, 49.

ideal must be built upon the actual. From these sources he learned that literature which leaves a world of men to dwell apart in a visionary, romantic or supernatural realm is a literature unsound and unsubstantial, unworthy of the name of art.[61] This notion grew to be the most important one in Carlyle's literary creed. It claimed the largest share of his interest and received from him an altogether original emphasis. According to this theory of literary art, the poet should interpret his own age, he should be his age's highest and truest interpreter. Of all men he is the one in his time to sift the true from the false, the permanent from the transient. It is a man's highest enterprise, says Carlyle, "that of being the Poet of his Age."[62] In this doctrine we find the explanation of Carlyle's almost exclusive interest in the great representative writers, who interpret national movements and who stand out as the intellectual leaders of their respective periods. "The great man," he says, "does, in good truth, belong to his own age; nay more so than any other man; being properly the synopsis and epitome of such age with its interests and influences."[63] The critical essays throughout witness to Carlyle's genius for interpreting and portraying the representative mind. Goethe is the "highest man of his time," and the "history of his mind is, in fact, the history of German culture in his day." In Voltaire, says Carlyle, we have "a European subject, or there never was one." Voltaire is the "man of his century," "the paragon and epitome of a whole spiritual period." Diderot, too, is "a significant epitome" of the age of Louis XV. Johnson is the "John Bull of Spiritual Europe," the ideal Tory. "Dante is the spokesman of the Middle Ages."[64] On the other hand Carlyle is not drawn to minds not of the first order,

[61] *Essays*, I, 195; II, 12, 13. [62] *Essays*, II, 51; III, 224–5.

[63] *Essays*, IV, 91; cf. I, 39. Though Carlyle derived these ideas, in so far as they relate exclusively to poets, mainly from Germany, they really express an attitude towards life that was taken independently. The plan of treating certain leaders of the Commonwealth as "representative," mentioned in the previous chapter, shows that the historical method, as well as the idea of hero-worship, was of independent origin (*E. Letters*, 206, 260).

[64] *Essays*, IV, 175; I, 176; II, 124, 125, 128; V, 4; IV, 128; *Heroes*, 91.

nor is he attracted by the lesser, out-of-the-way influences originating with such minds. The by-ways of literature do not lure him from its beaten high-road. He speaks of "the sonnet, elegy, song" as belonging to the "out-lying province of poetry." He says that the *Vicar of Wakefield* is a modern idyl "and nothing more." He thinks that no true poet will ever dwindle "into a man of *Vers de Société*."[65] Truth in its fulness and in its representative character, he held, can be revealed only in minds of the first rank and not in minds of the second, except as "secondary symptoms."[66] If it be asked why it was then that Carlyle showed so much interest in Richter and Novalis and was so profoundly affected by the careers of Burns and Byron (two names which, next to Goethe's, occur most often in his essays), we may say that these writers scarcely furnish an exception to the rule. Richter and Novalis were for Carlyle literary exponents of transcendentalism, the one a humorist, the other a mystic; both were minds that revealed truth. Carlyle loved and reverenced Burns because Burns was a native Scotch product and a song-maker of Shakespearian and universal order. He and Byron were the two British men of their age who were born to be poets in the high and ancient sense, but whom fortune and an undisciplined will prevented from delivering their message to the world. They were praised by Carlyle rather for their promised, than for their actual, achievement; and their tragical lives afforded him the texts of a hundred sermons.

Carlyle's idea of the poet as a representative man includes also the idea of him as the highest man of his time. In the strict sense art is aristocratic. Spiritual truth is born to one man here, to another there, but not in the same degree or kind to all men.[67] Art has therefore no concern with popularity; it makes no appeal to the popular ear, and is not dependent for approval upon the popular voice. Popularity affords no index, Carlyle says, of originality or greatness, for the favor of the many is no criterion of the value of literature. "In fact," he says, "the popular man, and the man of true, at

[65] *Essays*, II, 90; I, 185; I, 36.
[66] *Essays*, V, 47.
[67] *Essays*, II, 246.

least of great originality, are seldom one and the same. The popular man stands on our own level, the original man stands above us." "The multitude of voices is no authority"; "fame is no sure test of merit." To illustrate and support these opinions Carlyle was fond of citing the popularity of Kotzebue whose plays, he says, had been acted "in every theatre from Kamtschatka to Cadiz," but who for all that was "a lifeless bundle of dyed rags."[68] The true poet will rely wholly upon himself, since the inspiration as well as the enduring truth of his message originates in his own soul. Art is aristocratic because it is the creation of the highest minds, and because it makes its appeal independently of the praise or blame of the multitude.[69]

We reach the same conclusion at whatever point we take up a study of Carlyle's literary ideals, because a consistent and uniform doctrine underlies every expression of them. We have discussed the social aspects of these ideals and we are left upon a path that leads us immediately into the field occupied by the works of the later Carlyle. From the same mystic region of the unconscious proceed "all Poesies, and Religions, and Social Systems."[70] The poet evolves into the hero, and poetry becomes history. This change on the surface implies no change underneath, for the philosophy that forms the basis of Carlyle's literary creed is the foundation alike of his political and economical theories, his theories of ethics, education and religion. To test the accuracy of this statement, we have only to recall the principles proclaimed in every non-critical writing from *Characteristics* to *Heroes* and *Past and Present.* The age which Carlyle looks out upon is grown sick, skeptical, me-

[68] *Essays,* III, 116; I, 216; II, 142; VI, 31; II, 89; III, 245.

[69] *Essays,* II, 9, 51. Carlyle was the farthest from saying that art is restricted to the upper classes. He opposed French opinions of this sort, and he opposed English reviewers who claimed that German authors were socially low—as if that mattered. He asserted again and again that art is independent of rank. Goethe, he said, was "neither noble, nor plebeian, neither liberal nor servile, nor infidel nor devotee," but a "clear and universal Man" (*Essays,* I, 180). As regards *external* differences of society, art is democratic. The artist may spring from any rank or any people (*Essays,* I, 31–39, 199).

[70] *Essays,* IV, 35.

chanical, utilitarian. Reforms, schemes of government, new remedies for social ills, are unavailing, because without exception they begin from the outside instead of from within. No reform counts, says Carlyle, except a moral one. Benthamite ethics and economics, government by *laizzez-faire,* religion through "evidences" and "theologies," alike strive to change man by machinery, when he can be transformed only by spirit. Society does indeed exist to protect my property, but my property is the "*Life* in me." Happiness is not and never can be a result of external arrangement. The vital principle of all progress, economical, educational, religious, is that "soul is kindled only by soul." What the age needs therefore is a hero, and a government by aristocracy, for, "he who is to be my Ruler was chosen for me in Heaven." It scarcely needs to be pointed out that this entire creed is only an expansion, or development, of the one that we have been interpreting in the foregoing pages. Goethe, a poet in one decade, is for Carlyle a prophet in the next. He is the hero to whom a sick age must look for relief. The nature and mission of the poet as set forth in the earlier essays do not differ in essentials from the nature and mission of the hero as described in every social and political pamphlet. The hero, like the poet, is an oracle of a world unseen.[71]

[71] *Essays,* IV, 205; V, 50; VI, 149; II, 239; VI, 179; *Sartor Resartus,* 172, 175.

CHAPTER III

Ideals of Criticism

(*a*) *Principles and Methods*

Carlyle's theory of literature determines the principles and methods of his criticism. The standards of judgment which he applied to the interpretation of authors and their work grew out of his ideas of the nature and function of poetry. These principles are applied in every critical essay from first to last but they are rarely stated in direct form in the later essays, in which the treatment is so largely biographical. They are to be found chiefly in the criticism before 1832, in some instances expressed in brief categorical assertions, and in a few others expanded into something like a formal declaration or manifesto. The fullest statements occur in two essays, *The State of German Literature* (1827) and *Goethe* (1828). In substance both declarations are the same, but the earlier one frankly professes to be no more than an interpretation of German principles. We shall therefore quote from the second, in which Carlyle's position is taken independently:

"We are firm believers in the maxim," he says, "that, for all right judgment of any man or thing, it is useful, nay essential, to see his good qualities before pronouncing on his bad. . . . Let us consider what we mean by a fault. By the word fault we designate something that displeases use, that contradicts us. But here the question might arise: Who are *we?* This fault displeases, contradicts *us;* so far is clear; and had *we,* had *I* and *my* pleasure and confirmation been the chief end of the poet, then doubtless he has failed in that end, and his fault remains irremediably, and without defence. But who shall say whether such really was his object, whether such ought to have been his object? and if it was not and ought not to have been, what becomes of the fault? It must hang altogether undecided; we as yet know nothing of it; perhaps it may not be the poet's, but our own fault; perhaps it may be no fault whatever. To see rightly into this matter, to determine with any infallibility, whether what we call a fault *is* in very deed a fault, we must previously have settled two points, neither of which may be so readily settled. First, we

must have made plain to ourselves what the poet's aim really and truly was, how the task he had to do stood before his own eye, and how far, with such means as it afforded him, he has fulfilled it. Secondly, we must have decided whether and how far this aim, this task of his, accorded,—not with *us*, and our individual crochets, and the crochets of our little senate where we give or take the law,—but with human nature and the nature of things at large; with the universal principles of poetic beauty, not as they stand written in our text-books, but in the hearts and imaginations of all men. Does the answer in either case come out unfavorably; was there an inconsistency between the means and the end, a discordance between the end and the truth, there is a fault: was there not, there is no fault.

"Thus it would appear that the detection of faults, provided they be faults of any depth and consequence, leads us of itself into that region where also the higher beauties of the piece, if it have any true beauties, essentially reside. In fact, according to our view, no man can pronounce dogmatically with even a chance of being right, on the faults of a poem, till he has seen its very last and highest beauty; the last in becoming visible to anyone, which few ever look after, which indeed in most pieces it were very vain to look after; the beauty of the poem as a Whole, in the strict sense; the clear view of it as an indivisible Unity; and whether it has grown up naturally from the general soil of Thought." This criticism, Carlyle goes on to say, is not concerned with poetry that amuses, "for the study of which no man is required to give rules," but with poetry of a very different kind. "We speak of that Poetry which Masters write, which aims not at 'furnishing a languid mind with fantastic shows and indolent emotions,' but at incorporating the everlasting Reason of man in forms visible to his Sense, and suitable to it."[1]

In this manifesto Carlyle seeks to establish two fundamental principles of literary criticism. First, criticism is to deal only with serious literature, the nature of which we have analyzed in the previous chapter. Second, it should be constructive in its aims and methods. In order to be constructive, criticism has several functions to perform, each related to the other, and all together constituting a method, in theory at least, both comprehensive and profound. To begin with, criticism is interpretative. The critic must strive to see the poet's work, his aim and accomplishment, as the poet himself saw it; he must discover the author's innermost purpose, must study his work from within, must, in a word, penetrate to the soul of the poet and be able to describe what he discerns there. He cannot do this unless he commands a sympathy of the highest order,

[1] *Essays*, I, 218–221; cf. I, 283–4.

unless he is himself a seer. Next the critic must judge the work of a writer in terms of universal principles as they are revealed in the unfolding order of the world and are found written in the heart of man. In the accomplishment of this task, criticism has to regard wholes, not parts; since the final beauty of a poem, its permanent message or meaning, resides in an organic unity, without which literature is dead, a lifeless bundle of fragments. The interpretative method of criticism thus leads into the philosophical. The critic must not only have imagination and insight, he must also possess philosophical grasp and power of integration. When he has brought the poet's truth to light, it is his further duty to relate that truth to the larger environing world, both of general principles and of men and movements.[2] These two great methods of criticism—the interpretative and the philosophical—imply still others, the biographical, the historical and the comparative, the first two of which were defined and developed more completely by Carlyle than by any of his British contemporaries. It was a favorite saying of his, as we have pointed out, that the critic should see the poet's object as the poet himself saw it.[3] To do this the critic not only has to grasp the form in its totality, but he has also to know as much as possible of the poet's mind, within and without, from which this totality has grown. He must ask, says Carlyle, whether the unity "has grown up naturally from the general soil of Thought." The principle stated in its simplest terms is this: a true poem is a unity, which in turn springs from a deeper unity of mind; mind again is the result of two forces, always working together, and in great poets harmoniously together—

[2] It is everywhere implied in Carlyle that in the unity of a poem resides its relation to, or rather its *revelation* of, the infinite, or the transcendentally real; *e. g.*, "I see some vague outline of what a *whole* is; also how an individual delineation may be 'informed with the Infinite,' may appear hanging in the universe of time and space (partly): in which case is it a poem and a whole?" *Froude*, II, 79.

[3] In addition to the long passage quoted above see I, 283–4, 129; II, 128, 225; *Life of Schiller*, 2. Carlyle's method of procedure is like that of Sainte-Beuve, who, as Professor Harper remarks, "analyses the temperaments and characters of authors as a means of appreciating their works." *Sainte-Beuve*, 335.

innate spirit and environment. Here then is the germ of the biographical and historical methods of criticism. And inasmuch as Carlyle held that a literary work does not develop in isolation, but rather side by side with many others of similar kind, all of which is it of advantage to consider together, he expanded his historical method to include virtually another that in later years has been widely known as the comparative. Let us examine each in turn.

A passage from the essay on *Goethe* contains the essence of the biographical method. Of Goethe's poetry Carlyle says that it "is no separate faculty, no mental handicraft; but the voice of the whole harmonious manhood: nay, it is the very harmony of that rich manhood which forms his poetry."[4] Since the organic unity of a poem or of poetry springs from the total intellectual life of its author, since the total thought or meaning of a work is in fact that intellectual life transmitted to it by the poet's creative power, the poet's *mind* and the *unity* of his literary creation are one and the same. If you know the poet's mind, you know the poetry he has written; if you know the poetry in its totality, you also know the mind from which it originated. This principle, as Carlyle would say, applies in strictness only to poets and poetry of the first rank, to those writers who have succeeded in revealing some phase of the Divine Idea. Upon this principle, therefore, the relation between the man and the book is direct and vital: the writing is a reflex of the writer, just as the writer in turn is a "Reflex of the All."[5]

This biographical method determines the general structure of nearly all of the critical essays. Carlyle first presents an account of the writer's life, emphasizing such facts as appear to him characteristic and offering some reflections upon the man regarded as a living unity. The work of the author he regards as an expression of his character, as indeed an integral part of it, revealed now not in actions but in words. In the earliest of the collected works, the *Life of Schiller* we find an application of this method, though the nature of the work prevented a thoroughgoing use of it. "It would be interesting,"

[4] *Essays*, I, 180. [5] *Ibid.*, V, 5.

Carlyle says, "to discover by what gifts and what employment of them [Schiller] reached the eminence on which we now see him; to follow the steps of his intellectual and moral culture; to gather from his life and works some picture of himself. It is worth inquiring, whether he, who could represent noble actions so well, did himself act nobly; how those powers of intellect, which in philosophy and art achieved so much, applied themselves to the everyday emergencies of life; how the generous ardour, which delights us in his poetry, displayed itself in the common intercourse between man and man. It would at once instruct and gratify us if we could understand him thoroughly, could transport ourselves into his circumstances outward and inward, could see as he saw, and feel as he felt."[6] These self-imposed questions indicate a keen curiosity on the part of the critic as to whether there is a conformity, a living harmony, between Schiller's life and works, as upon Carlyle's theory there should be. Accordingly each of the three divisions of the life of the poet is followed by an interpretation of his writings regarded as an expression of the poet at that particular epoch. The whole is concluded with a characterization in which the close relation between Schiller the man and Schiller the poet is the prominent feature.[7] The biographical method is fully developed in the introduction to *German Romance,* and in the first *Richter* (1827). In the essay on Goethe Carlyle puts the following questions: "What manner of man *is* this? How shall we interpret, how shall we even see him? What is his spiritual structure, what at least are the outward form and features of his mind? Has he any real poetic worth; how much to his own people, how much to us?"[8] He finds in Werner, the dramatist, an exact correspondence between man and work.[9] In truth the whole body of his criticism from first essay to last is constructed upon this theory, that the literary performance of an author is, or should be, an expression of his moral character.

[6] *Life of Schiller, 2.*

[7] Cf. *Essays,* III, 94. "Schiller's intellectual character has, as indeed is always the case, an accurate conformity with his moral one."

[8] *Ibid.,* I, 173.

[9] *Ibid.,* I, 117–118. Cf. II, 225; V, 4–7.

His method is at all times likely to lead to a one-sided criticism. The critic who regards poetry as life and life as poetry may fail to find sustaining vitality in the literary works of his day and come to regard the acted life as the only poetry. This is what happened in the case of Carlyle. When he had done with the Germans, when he came to think that no real literature was being produced in England, and when, tired of criticism, he wished to write original books, as he did more and more insistently after 1830, he inevitably gave prominence to the biographical side, to the neglect, if not to the omission, of the literary. The essays on Goethe's Works, Johnson, Diderot and Scott, for example, give a great deal of attention to the outward life, while they show a notable disregard of very many important literary matters. At all times Carlyle was prone to make much of critical moments in a man's acted life, when his moral nature was supremely tried. Goethe passing from the *Werter* to the *Meister* period, Burns at Edinburgh, Johnson replying to Chesterfield, Scott mounting to the summit of his fame, Voltaire during his last triumph at Paris, Diderot at the court of Catherine—these dramatic episodes are introduced and dwelt upon more for their own sake than for the light they shed upon the genesis or quality of the man's literary work. The biographer and the historian not infrequently threatened to overshadow the critic.

From the biographical to the historical method the path is direct and short. "No character," Carlyle says in *Voltaire*, "was ever rightly understood till it had first been regarded with a certain feeling, not of tolerance only, but of sympathy . . . But to judge rightly of [a man's] character, we must learn to look at it, not less with his eyes than with our own."[10] To understand a poet's work from the poet's point of view, as sound criticism requires us to understand it, demands a careful consideration of his whole outer environment, social, political, national, epochal. Carlyle is clear and emphatic upon this point. The reader should be warned again, however, that with Carlyle environment is not everything. After we know the outer forces that have played upon the poet and moulded his

[10] *Ibid.*, II, 128.

life to a certain shape, we have still to study his original nature, we have yet to discover the "idea" in him that he was destined to reveal. The critic scornfully rejects the notion that a great man, whether poet or hero, can be wholly "accounted" for. Even as art in the deepest sense is universal and perennial, and for these reasons independent of fashion,[11] so the artist has within him a free creative spirit, which the philosophical critic shall appreciate after the work of the historical critic is done.[12] But while urging this, Carlyle in the same breath declares that "no man works save under conditions"[13]—a truth which he learned from Goethe. Perhaps the best statement of his position is that in the essay on Diderot:

> **"It is a great truth, one side of a great truth, that Man makes the Circumstances, and spiritually as well as economically is the artificer of his own fortune. But there is another side of the same truth, that the man's circumstances are the element he is appointed to live and work in; that he by necessity takes his complexion, vesture, embodiment, from these, and is in all practical manifestations modified by them almost without limit; so that in another no less genuine sense, it can be said Circumstances make the Man. Now, if it continually behoves us to insist on the former truth towards ourselves, it equally behoves us to bear in mind the latter when we judge of other men."**[14]

Carlyle's appreciation of this principle as regards literature and literary men is two-fold. First, he everywhere insists that the *nationality* of literary work and of authors must be taken account of in a judgment of the one or the other. In the *Preface to German Romance,* for example, he says the reader must not lose sight of one thing, *viz.,* "They are German novelists, not English ones; and their Germanhood I have all along regarded as a quality, not as fault."[15] Again in the case of Goethe, who was so persistently and ludicrously misjudged by English reviewers, Carlyle asks for a just consideration of national differences: "Goethe's world is every way so different from ours; it costs us such effort, we have so much to remember, and so much to forget, before we can transfer ourselves in any measure into his peculiar point of vision, that

[11] *Ibid.,* I, 199, 282.
[12] *Ibid.,* II, 243–246; *Heroes,* 11.
[13] *Heroes,* 102.
[14] *Essays,* V, 47; cf. II, 33.
[15] *Ibid.,* I, 231; cf. I, 227.

a right study of him, for an Englishman, even of ingenuous, open, inquisitive mind, becomes unusually difficult; for a fixed, decided, contemptuous Englishman, next to impossible."[16] The critic must "remember that a Foreigner is no Englishman; that in judging a foreign work, it is not enough to ask whether it is suitable to our *modes* but whether it is suitable to foreign *wants;* above all, whether it is suitable to itself."[17] Second—(and this point is even more significant than the first) poetry and poets must be interpreted in relation to their age, as its true representatives. Carlyle considers poetry not only as the choicest flower of an age, but as the essence of its history. The comprehensiveness of this aspect of the historical method as used by Carlyle is best shown in his definition of literary history, in which he points out that the literature of a nation must be taken as a whole and must be regarded as a record of the spiritual evolution of an entire people:

"A History of German, or of any national Poetry, would form, taken in its complete sense, one of the most arduous enterprises any writer could engage in. Poetry, were it the rudest, so it be sincere, is the attempt which man makes to render his existence harmonious, the utmost he can do for that end: it springs therefore from his whole feelings, opinions, activity, and takes its character from these. It may be called the music of his whole manner of being; and, historically considered, is the test how far Music, or Freedom, existed therein; how far the feeling of Love, of Beauty and Dignity, could be elicited from that peculiar situation of his, and from the views he there had of Life and Nature, of the Universe, internal and external. Hence, in any measure to understand the Poetry, to estimate its worth and historical meaning, we ask as a quite fundamental inquiry: What that situation was? Thus the History of a nation's Poetry is the essence of its History, political, economic, scientific, religious. With all these the complete Historian of a national Poetry will be familiar; the national physiognomy, in its finest traits, and through its successive stages of growth, will be clear to him: He will discern the grand spiritual Tendency of each period, what was the highest Aim and Enthusiasm of mankind in each, and how one epoch naturally evolved itself from the other. He has to record the highest Aim of a nation, in its successive directions and developments; for by this the Poetry of the nation modulates itself; this *is* the poetry of the nation.

[16] *Ibid.*, I, 181.

[17] *Ibid.*, I, 222; see also I, 33, and V, 47, where Carlyle says that Diderot must be regarded as a Frenchman of the eighteenth century.

"Such were the primary essence of a true History of Poetry; the living principle round which all detached facts and phenomena, all separate characters of Poems and Poets, would fashion themselves into a coherent whole, if they are by any means to cohere. To accomplish such a work for any Literature would require not only all outward aids, but an excellent inward faculty: all telescopes and observatories were of no avail, without the seeing eye and the understanding heart." [18]

Carlyle was the first English critic of importance to adopt the historical method as an articulate part of his criticism. He can think of no man or literature apart from its age. In the *Divine Comedy*, "All Christianism, as Dante and the Middle Ages had it, is emblemed."[19] The Elizabethan era with its Shakespeare, is the outcome and flowerage of all which preceded it.[20] A study of Goethe's spiritual development implies a study of the "progress also of his nation."[21] The literature before and during the age of Voltaire, Diderot, Goethe, Johnson, Burns and Scott is recognized as a necessary factor in a just appreciation of these men. This statement holds good, even though, as we may remember, Carlyle had no interest in the smaller problems of literary relationship and saw no profit in exploring streams of influence up to the tiniest source.[22] None knew better than he that the critic, or literary historian, will not arrive at a complete, or even an adequate understanding of his material until he has comprehended the total environment of which literature is the final expression.

Nor did he overlook entirely the comparative method in criticism, though this receives less recognition than any of the other methods. Had he continued a literary critic, deepening his interest in pure literature as his knowledge of life expanded undoubtedly Carlyle would have given us many an admirable

[18] *Ibid.*, III, 224. In Carlyle's notebook for 1827, among the works which he would like to write is mentioned "A History of English Literature; from the times of Chaucer; Warton's *History of English Poetry* would do something in the way of help, but nothing as a model. The men ought to be *judged*, not prated of; and the whole environment of their talent, as well as the talent itself, set fairly before the reader." (*Two Note-Books*, 120.)

[19] *Heroes*, 90.

[20] *Ibid.*, 95.

[21] *Essays*, I, 176.

[22] Cf. *ibid.*, VI, 64.

illustration of this method, because he was keenly aware that no great poet or poetry is related to a single literature. And yet his essays as they stand show that he rarely introduces the literature of one nation without glancing at that of another during the same period. He compares the literary condition of Germany with that of England in the eighteenth century;[23] he compares the literary condition of Scotland in Burns's day with that in England and France.[24] Streams of philosophical and religious influence run parallel in England and on the continent.[25] The romantic movement Carlyle from the first looks upon as European, due to intellectual tendencies and disturbances breaking out not only in Germany and England, but in France and Italy.[26] The *Götz* and *Werter* periods in German literature, the storm and stress, are followed by similar manifestations in the literature of England.[27] The new critical science itself does not belong to Germany alone; "it is a European tendency, and springs from the general condition of intellect in Europe"[28] Wherever Carlyle turns to look at literary conditions his view is a broad one, always extending beyond the limits of England to other lands and peoples. He was too thoroughly steeped in German thought, too sensitive himself to alien influences, to make his horizon include less than the intellectual culture of Europe.

Carlyle's idea of the nature and function of criticism is therefore comprehensive and profound. The main business of the critic is summed up in the one word interpretation; all his other offices are bound up in this. "Criticism," says Carlyle, "stands like an interpreter between the inspired and the uninspired, between the prophet and those who hear the melody of his words, and catch some glimpse of their material meaning, but understood not their deeper import."[29] The true critic looks within the poem, he does not seek to apply ready made rules from without; for he knows that only by this subjective method can he arrive at the meaning of the poem, its

[23] *Ibid.*, I, 42, 185.
[24] *Ibid.*, II, 26.
[25] *Ibid.*, I, 186.
[26] *Ibid.*, I, 246, 45; II, 170.
[27] *Ibid.*, I, 188, 273.
[28] *Ibid.*, I, 45.
[29] *Ibid.*, I, 44.

"indivisible Unity." The true critic must be a psychologist, must have the power to decipher character, must be able to read the writing as an expression of the writer. He must possess the historical sense and have the rare faculty of putting himself into the position of the poet, into his age, his nation, his life, in order that he may understand the complex forces that have combined to mould the poet's life and work. But when he has done all this, the critic has perhaps his hardest task still to do. He must finally judge writer and writing in terms of universal principles of poetic beauty as they are unfolded in the cosmic process or are revealed "in the inmost Spirit of Man." The true critic, like the poet, is a seer and exercises the power of creation; for criticism "is in some sort a creative art; aiming, at least, to reproduce under a different shape the existing product of the poet."[30] Every human being possesses in some measure the gifts and feeling of the poet;[31] but only he whose mind is richly cultivated can fully interpret the poet's meaning. "To apprehend this beauty of poetry," Carlyle says, "in its full and purest brightness, is not easy, but difficult; thousands on thousands eagerly read poems, and attain not the smallest taste of it; yet to all uncorrupted hearts, some effulgences of this heavenly glory are here and there revealed; and to apprehend it clearly and wholly to acquire and maintain a sense and heart that sees and worships it—is the last perfection of all humane culture."[32] The mind of the critic—that is to say—must be trained to relate the life of a poem to philosophical principles, to measure the poet's produce in terms of the highest generalizations reached by human knowledge. Criticism is thus in the final analysis not logical but intuitional in its methods;[33] and though it deals only with serious literature, it is not didactic in its aims, because it holds that literature teaches not by rules and precepts but by the communication of life.[34] Criticism is thus not mechanical, but poetical. Lastly, though its criteria are subjective, criticism is not impressionistic in the latter-day

[30] *Ibid.*, I, 52.
[31] *Ibid.*, II, 18.
[32] *Ibid.*, I, 47.
[33] *Ibid.*, I, 181.
[34] *Ibid.*, III, 172.

sense, because the appreciation that it reaches does not rest upon individual caprice, but upon "rules of universal application."[85] Criticism in spirit and purpose is scientific; it endeavors to draw individual life and poetry into the circle of ultimate ideas.[86]

(*b*) *Sources and Relations*

At the time when Carlyle was formulating his principles, a revolution in literary criticism had already taken place in Germany and was far advanced in England. Old standards were breaking down before new. Under the mighty impulse of Rousseau in France and Kant in Germany, a reconstruction had proceeded rapidly in all the ideals underlying philosophy and literature, as well as society, even before the eighteenth century had completed its third quarter. Winkelmann and Lessing were transforming ideas on art and turning the attention of intellectual Germany to the literature of the past.[87] Then came Herder, followed by Goethe and Schiller, Richter and Fichte, all of whom did invaluable service in sweeping away old and worn-out theories and in erecting upon philosophical foundations a criticism at once appreciative, historical, and comparative. In 1798 the German romantic school, under the generalship of the Schlegels, raised its banner and declared independence in the realm of art.

The movement grew and spread, until its quickening influence became felt in England. Schlegel's *Lectures on Dramatic Litrature,* as translated by John Black, were noticed in the *Edinburgh Review* for February, 1816.[88] Three years before, Madame de Staël's *Germany* had appeared in London in the original and was reviewed in the *Quarterly.*[89] *Blackwood's* for October, 1823, remarks that "Madame de Staël's *Germany* is in every hand; and Professor Schlegel's *Lectures* are at least in many." But the new era in criticism started in

[85] *Ibid.,* I, 33, 219. [86] *Ibid.,* I, 44, 53.

[87] Winkelmann's *Gesichichte der Kunst des Alterthums,* 1764; Lessing's *Laöcoon,* 1766, and *Hamburgische Dramaturgie,* 1767–1769.

[88] A French version was reviewed in the *Quarterly* for October, 1814.

[89] October, 1814.

England several years before German criticism had gained even a slight foothold. Wordsworth's *Preface* to the *Lyrical Ballads* was published in 1800, and from 1808 to 1818 Coleridge delivered his lectures on literature in five series. In 1817, with the appearance of his *Biographia Literaria,* Coleridge became the first of English critics, and a profound interpreter of the new principles. His labors were ably supported and supplemented by the criticism of Lamb and Hazlitt, two of the most sensitive minds that ever gave themselves to the appreciation of literature.[40] In the earlier part of the century also the great reviews were founded; and these, while often destructive and reactionary in their critical tendencies, contributed something to the new movement.[41] By 1824, therefore, when Carlyle's translation of *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* was published, romantic criticism was a settled thing in Germany and was rapidly gaining ground in England under the leadership of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Lamb and Hazlitt.

Chance comments in his early letters show that Carlyle, partly by the bent of his own genius and partly by the directive force of the newer ideals, was moving toward philosophical and historical criticism, even before Goethe and the other Germans could have much affected his thought. In 1819 upon reading a part of Rousseau's *Confessions* he remarks that he would like to see the remainder of it, in order "to try, if possible, to connect the character of Jean Jacques with my previous ideas of human nature."[42] He proposes Madame de Staël to Jane Welsh as a subject for an essay and asks: "What is to hinder you from delineating your conception of her mind?"[43] In another letter, commenting on *Wilhelm Meister,* he says: "I have accurately copied a striking portrait of Goethe's mind."[44] Again in 1822 he tells his brother that the essay on

[40] Lamb's *Specimens* appeared in 1808; Hazlitt's *Lectures on the Characters of Shakespeare* in 1817, his *Lectures on the English Poets* in 1818, his *Lectures on the Comic Writers* in 1819, and a year later, his *Dramatic Literature of the Age of Elizabeth.*

[41] The *Edinburgh Review* was established in 1802, the *Quarterly* in 1809, and *Blackwood's* in 1817.

[42] *E. Letters,* 112.

[43] *Ibid.,* 217.

[44] *Ibid.,* 308.

the Civil Wars which he thinks of writing will consider certain distinguished actors in that drama for the purpose of exhibiting "some features of the national character."[45] These evidences of critical attitude revealed in random remarks show that the seeds were already sown in Carlyle's mind and only needed nourishment from German thought in order to develop into a fruitful system.

We need go no further than Fichte and Goethe for the German critical ideals to which Carlyle was so largely indebted. The "critical principles of Tieck and the Schlegels," he himself said, derive from Goethe and Schiller and "have been deduced patiently, and by long investigation, from the highest and calmest regions of Philosophy."[46] That is to say, the new criticism laid its foundation upon transcendental philosophy as it originated with Kant and was developed by Fichte. Concerning this system we do not need to repeat what has already been said in the second chapter, and it is only necessary to point out that the final task of the critic is to discover by the aid of this philosophy the "divine idea" which the poet has imparted to his work.[47] It is significant that to Fichte Carlyle owes the best statement of the historical method in criticism. According to the thought of Fichte, "each age, by the law of its nature, is different from every other age, and demands a different representation of the Divine Idea, the essence of which is the same in all; so that the literary man of one century is only by mediation and reinterpretation applicable to the wants of another."[48] In this passage we find a clear recognition of the relation of the poet to his age, and of the development or change in form of the Idea from age to age—the very kernel of the historical method. This great principle, therefore, as well as the entire metaphysical basis of the new criticism we may trace to Fichte and the other Kantians.

But for its animating and sustaining spirit, for its method in all departments except the purely philosophical, we should go to Goethe. In his writings there is a body of critical maxims from which Carlyle derived invaluable and incalculable

[45] *Ibid.*, 206.
[46] *Essays*, I, 246; 44.
[47] *Ibid.*, I, 47–50.
[48] *Ibid.*, 50.

support and for which he made the fullest acknowledgment. But even in the case of Goethe it is well to limit our search for borrowings to the criticism of *Hamlet* in *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, an interpretation which reveals the heart of Goethe's method and which Carlyle himself calls "the poetry of criticism."[49] According to the method here employed criticism looks at a poem from the author's point of view, studies character in relation to its environment, seeks to penetrate to the original and organic idea of the work. It therefore regards a poem not in parts but as a whole, searching thus for its central idea, which it discovers by intuition and announces not by argument but by exposition. This criticism demands a critic who is an interpreter, who looks within with his own eyes, who can know a work by "the inward truth" of his own conceptive power and in whom lies "a presentiment of all the universe" which by the "harmonious touch of poetry is awakened and unfolded."[50] We have here a group of principles which Carlyle accepted *in toto* and which he set up and defended as the true ideals of a sound and substantial criticism. In fact a short passage wherein Goethe describes Wilhelm Meister might be applied word for word to Carlyle in his critical capacity. "Wilhelm always wished," says Goethe, "to deduce everything from abstract ideas which he had arrived at; he wanted to have art viewed in all its connexions as a whole. He wanted to promulgate and fix down universal laws; to settle what was right, beautiful and good: in short, he treated all things in a serious manner."[51] Carlyle's indebtedness to

[49] *Ibid.*, I, 52. In a letter written before Carlyle had composed his essay on the *State of German Literature*, Goethe notices how Carlyle in his introductions to *German Romance* keeps the balance between individuality and environment, and how he dwells on what is "specially characteristic of national tendencies." Goethe also point out that the "efforts of the best poets and æsthetic writers of all nations have now for some time been directed towards what is universal in humanity." In his reply Carlyle says that these ideas command his entire assent (*Corresp.*, 23, 24, 33).

[50] The criticism of *Hamlet* is to be found on pp. 190–191, 214–217, 223–227 of Vol. I; and pp. 12–25, Vol. II, of Carlyle's translation of *Wilhelm Meister*.

[51] *Meister*, I, 241. In describing the new criticism (*Essays*, I, 43–44) Carlyle seems to be putting questions, with Goethe's criticism of *Hamlet*

Goethe and the relation of his doctrines to those preached by his master, may be seen with great distinctness throughout the *Appreniceship,* not only in the passages relating to *Hamlet,* but in the hundred and one sayings upon art and literature scattered up and down this most suggestive and searching book. We do not therefore exceed the truth if we say that Carlyle's main critical principles, derive, after Fichte and the transcendentalists, largely from *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* by Goethe. What he received from other sources only confirmed what he found there.[52]

This German criticism Carlyle describes as new and as entirely different from established or orthodox English criticism, past and present.

"The grand question," he says, "is not now a question concerning the qualities of diction, the coherence of metaphors, the fitness of sentiments, the general logical truth, in a work of art, as it was some half century ago among most critics; neither is it a question mainly of a psychological sort, to be answered by discovering and delineating the peculiar nature of the poet from his poetry, as is usual with the best of our own critics at present: but it is, not indeed exclusively, but inclusively of those two other questions, properly and ultimately a question on the essence and peculiar life of the poetry itself. The first of these questions, as we see it answered, for instance, in the criticisms of Johnson and Kames, relates, strictly speaking, to the *garment* of poetry; the second, indeed, to its *body* and material existence, a much higher point; but only the last to its *soul.*"[53]

In other words, the criticism which Carlyle set up and practiced is squarely opposed to the neo-classic eighteenth century theories represented by Pope and Johnson; and likewise to those advocated by the school of Jeffrey, high priest of the periodical criticism of Carlyle's own day. Professor Saintbury has described neo-classic criticism as a system of rules, applied ac-

in mind. In a conversation with Eckermann, Goethe remarked approvingly upon Carlyle's criticism of German authors, to the effect that Carlyle had especially in view "the spiritual and moral kernal"—*den geistigen und sittlichen Kern*—as that which is really efficacious (*Gespräche,* III, 123; cf. *ibid.,* II, 22, and *Corresp.,* 99—"the Scot seeks to penetrate the work").

[52] Carlyle of course owed a good deal to Schiller, but as Schiller's ideas in so far as Carlyle's shows their influence, rest upon the transcendental philosophy, it does not seem necessary to deal with them further than they have already been dealt with in the second chapter.

[53] *Essays,* I, 43.

cording to good taste or good sense. "You never criticise anything," he says, "first in itself, but with immediate reference to its Kind. You must please in the Kind, by the Quality —according to the Rule."[54] This method besides carrying with it the authority of great names, was developed in an attenuated and gallicized form by such men as Blair and Lord Kames, whose works were standard in Carlyle's student days at Edinburgh. References to this school of criticism in the essays are few and scattered, but sufficient to point very clearly to Carlyle's attitude toward it. In one place he says that Kames borrowed his principles from "Racine and Voltaire, Batteaux and Boileau."[55] He refers to a neo-classic French critic of the late seventeenth century—Bossu—as one who could not measure Herder, Schiller, Goethe, "with his scales and compasses."[56] He says that William Taylor uses Sulzer's *Universal Theory* as his road-book to the temple of German taste, "almost as if the German critic should undertake to measure *Waverley* and *Manfred* by the scale of *Blair's Lectures.*"[57] Again in picturesque phrase he speaks of "that old strait-laced, microscopic sect of *belles lettres* men, whose divinity was Elegance, a creed of French growth."[58] From these scattered comments it is evident that Carlyle looked upon the old creed of criticism as a system of narrow rules, by which the externals, the garment of poetry, were measured. Its criteria were totally inadequate to be of use for judging the new poetry which had a wholly different origin and made a wholly different appeal from that of the conventional eighteenth century literature.

Carlyle's relation to Jeffrey and to the periodical criticism for which he stood was far more definitely one of sustained and active opposition, for Jeffrey as editor of the *Edinburgh Review* was enthroned in power at the very time when Carlyle was preaching the new criticism by every means at his command. In the passage quoted above he speaks of the criticism of his day as mainly of a psychological sort, which, being liber-

[54] *History of Criticism,* II, 407–421.
[55] *Essays,* II, 27.
[56] *Ibid.,* I, 43.
[57] *Ibid.,* III, 235.
[58] *Ibid.,* III, 3.

ally interpreted, means the impressionistic criticism prevalent in the great reviews of the time, though the phrase was probably written with Jeffrey in mind as chief among the sinners. Jeffrey's criticism, unlike that of most of his contemporaries, was pretty well formulated and rested upon certain psychological theories that he obtained from Alison, the apostle of "Taste."[59] In a review of Alison in the *Edinburgh* for May, 1811, Jeffrey laid down some principles of æsthetics and criticism that underly his own critical ideals. The object of poetry, he said, is to give pleasure. The quality and worth of this pleasure are estimated by a select number of judges, necessarily few, who possess good taste, that is, who are qualified "by natural sensibility and long experience and reflection to perceive all beauties that really exist, as well as to settle the relative value and importance of all different sorts of beauty."[60] Jeffrey considered himself as one of the judges. He appreciated literature in terms of his own taste, which he regarded as representative of the taste of cultivated people; and he always seemed to be looking to these, as an advocate to a jury, for a sustaining verdict. The taste to which he appeals is defined as the capacity to perceive beauty; and beauty, according to Alison's association theory, is a pleasurable feeling excited in us by objects which move us because, by the power of association, they call up certain primary emotions. Whoever derives pleasure from an object, that object to him is beautiful. Each individual has within himself his own standard of beauty and hence of taste. Individual taste is not necessarily good, because the person who possesses it may have a very narrow range of associations. Only those whose associations are wide, whose experiences and sympathies are broad and deep, have good taste, because to them alone is beauty brought from a great number and variety of objects. Taste is therefore a relative term, the best taste belonging to him whose nature is

[59] The Rev. Archibald Alison's *Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste*, published in 1790, was a standard work for nearly forty years. Carlyle several times refers to "Parson Alison" and his principle of taste, by which "we judge of poetry as we judge of dinner" (*Life of Schiller*, 99; *Essays*, I, 221; *Froude*, I, 304–305).

[60] Jeffrey's *Essays, Modern British Essayists*, I, 368.

most richly developed. The only reason why the lower beauty should give place to the higher, is "to assist in the cultivation of a finer morality."[61] From first to last the theory is empirical, sensational, associational, springing from the older psychology of Hume and Locke. It is English in origin and stands for what is commonsense and practical in criticism; and it rests securely upon a basis of morality. It differs by a whole heaven from the criticism of Carlyle, whose ultimate standards are found in philosophy, not in psychology; and whose method is intuitional, not associational. Carlyle habitually refers to absolute values, to a highest truth, or beauty, or reality, established in the deepest part of man's nature and independent of pleasurable associations. With Jeffrey the competent critic is the judge of cultivated taste; with Carlyle he is the interpreter with a creative faculty and a seer's vision.

In the hands of a catholic, discriminating and sensitively tempered critic, Jeffrey's principles might have been productive of much fine and enduring criticism, but as wielded by him the critic's rule became a schoolmaster's rod. Assuming the infallibility of his own taste and judgment, he tries to whip errant authors into line and he measures everything in the "I like it" and "I don't like it" manner. He brings the poem into his judicial presence, as it were, and appreciates it in terms of the number, variety and quality of sensations of beauty which it awakens in him. He marks and quotes passages for praise or blame. He judges parts and fragments, since he seeks impressions rather than ideas. Carlyle calls this the method of the "Negative School," because it is destructive in its results and contents itself with exhibiting violations of good taste. Its approach to a poem is external, and it always applies a set of ready-made principles. In much of the criticism of Jeffrey, therefore, there survives the spirit and the letter of the eighteenth century neo-classic doctrine.

In one important particular, however, there is some agreement with Carlyle. Jeffrey uses the historical method in a faint and tentative fashion and thus slightly anticipates the younger critic. Professor Gates in an essay on Jeffrey[62]

[61] *Ibid.*, 38.

[62] *Three Studies in Literature*, 33–38.

points out that the disposition to take account of social conditions as influencing literature, first unmistakably shows itself in Jeffrey's essays in 1811, or about the time when Madame de Staël's book on Germany was so widely read. This fact suggests that in so far as Jeffrey used the historical method, he derived it from Germany through Madame de Staël, whose work he knew. Whether he actually borrowed from this source or from another his recognition of the importance of the method is slight and his use of it slighter. There is some evidence of it in the essay on *Ford's Dramatic Works,* for Jeffrey sees that literary influences extend from age to age, from nation to nation, and he sees also that there is a relation between a literature and the social forces of the period in which it is produced. But the essay on *Wilhelm Meister* contains the fullest statement of the historical method that Jeffrey ever made. He inquires into the causes which bring about differences of taste in different nations, and he finds these to be two, namely, the lateness or slowness of development in some nations as compared with others, and certain accidental and degrading conditions, such as kind of government, castes, etc., in one nation which do not exist in another. He concludes that the character of "original writers must have been modified to a great extent by the circumstances of the countries in which they were bred."[68] Beyond this general account there is little in Jeffrey's criticism to indicate that he placed much importance upon or found much interest in the historical method. To specific cases, such as in the essay on Ford, he applied it only in a limited measure, not at all with the wide grasp which characterizes Carlyle's handling. The fact is that literature was not for Jeffrey what it invariably was for Carlyle, the highest spiritual expression of the life of a people. The primary condition of criticism implied in this view is that it should see a literature from its own side. And this is what Jeffrey's criticism never does. He looks at *Wilhelm Meister* as a violation of English taste. He makes no serious effort to study German taste, or German ideas, least of all to study these as indexes of the character of the German people.

[68] Jeffrey, *Essays* (*M. B. E.*), 105.

Consequently his position remains restricted and insular, limited to psychological considerations, and is never broad enough to admit principles of philosophical depth and range. Yet it is proper to point out that if Carlyle owes nothing to Jeffrey in the use of the historical method he was not quite the first to employ it in English literary criticism. There were faint traces of it in Jeffrey a decade before Carlyle began to write.[64]

The editor of the *Edinburgh Review* was for Carlyle the leading representative of periodical criticism current in his day. This criticism was never very friendly to German ideas, and it was sometimes absurdly hostile, so much so that many an article aroused Carlyle's wrath and evoked from him well-merited condemnation, couched in phrases both picturesque and pungent.[65] In order that we may appreciate the difficulties in the way even of a critic with Carlyle's fighting spirit, let us glance at three reviews of his translations of *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship,* as examples of early nineteenth century periodical criticism. The first is in *Blackwood's* for June, 1824,[66] and was probably written by Lockhart, who had been in Germany and who showed some interest in German literature. Beginning with the assertion that he will give his opinion of Goethe "as it is," the reviewer mildly praises the poet in a general way before he comes to *Wilhelm Meister.* In this work he condemns the critical dialogue "as so many impertinent interruptions" which the reader is to skip, whilst he follows the story of Mignon. The review concludes with a brief outline of this story, interspersed with copious extracts which Carlyle would call "fragments." Such is a favorable review.

[64] Carlyle well understood the mind and temper of Jeffrey and the spirit and method of his criticism. He called Jeffrey "a good man and bad critic" (*Goethe-Carlyle Corr.,* 259); "a true newspaper critic on the great scale" (*Froude,* II, 103); "I found," he says, "that essentially he was always as if speaking to a jury" (*Rem.,* II, 253). In a well-known passage he calls Jeffrey's method the method of Molière's maid,—"do *you* like it? *Don't* you like it?—a style which in hands more and more inferior to that sound-hearted old lady and him, has since grown gradually to such immeasurable lengths among us" (*Ibid.,* II, 271). See also *E. Letters,* 337.

[65] See *Essays, e. g.,* II, 186.

[66] Vol. XV, 619–632.

The essay by De Quincey in the *Monthly Magazine* of the same year illustrates a hostile attitude and is typical of English opinion toward Goethe in 1824. After declaring that by the publication of this revolting book, Goethe's name must totter, and after severely and pedantically censuring Carlyle's translation, De Quincey opens his criticism with the remark that in the judgment of a novel there is one rule, "the golden rule of good sense and just feeling." He then turns to Goethe's shockingly immoral creation and proceeds to exhibit its indecencies under the two heads of *Gallery of Female Portraits* and *History of Mr. Meister's Affairs of the Heart.* Such is the manner in which that "cockney animalcule," as Carlyle dubbed De Quincey, reviewed a German book.[67] Jeffrey's article in the *Edinburgh* for August, 1825, has already in part been referred to. It reveals the same method as De Quincey's critique though as compared with that, it is mild in manner and broad in scope. Yet Jeffrey cannot refrain from saying that *Wilhelm Meister* is "one flagrant offense against every principle of taste, and every just rule of composition."[68] The book, he says, illustrates German extravagance and German vulgarity, mixed up with German mataphysics. These wholesale condemnations the reviewer follows up by quotations tagged with likes or dislikes. It is no wonder that Carlyle protests again and again against this style of criticism, a criticism by fragments and not by wholes,[69] and everlastingly in terms of taste.[70] It is no wonder that he finds the English reviewers' portrait of Goethe "resembling Goethe, as some unusually expressive Sign of the Saracen's Head may resemble the present Sultan of Constantinople."[71] It is no wonder finally that with these reviewers and their reviews in mind he describes the critical period of his day as one of literary anarchy; "for the Pandects of Blair and Bossu are obsolete or abrogated, but no new code supplies their place; and, author and critic, each sings or says that which is right in his own eyes."[72] His essay on the *State of German Literature,* for

[67] De Quincey, *Collected Writings,* ed. Masson, XI, 226–256.
[68] Jeffrey, *Essays,* 106.
[69] *Essays,* I, 54, 220, 226, 283.
[70] *Ibid.,* I, 132, 221.
[71] *Ibid.,* I, 173.
[72] *Ibid.,* I, 246.

example, is not only an exposition of German criticism, but throughout a stout attack upon the methods of Jeffrey and the reviewers, or upon criticism as a "Science of Negation."[73]

The justification for dwelling at some length upon the ideals and methods of this school of negative criticism lies in the fact that Carlyle's own position as an innovator, his own sustained battle for the new criticism, is the more sharply brought to view, if we clearly discern the forces that were allied against him. But Carlyle did not fight alone. Independent and fearless as he was, he marched in the ranks of men who followed the flag of romantic criticism, and he received even from the English contingent a kind of moral support greater than he was perhaps aware of. He did not call the movement romantic, but he clearly understood that an effort was being made to reconstruct criticism and that it was common to Germany, England, France and Italy. "It is a European tendency," he says of it, "and springs from the general condition of intellect in Europe. We ourselves have all, for the last thirty years, more or less distinctly felt the necessity of such a science: witness the neglect into which our Blairs and Bossus have silently fallen; our increased and increasing admiration, not only of Shakespeare, but of all his contemporaries, and of all who breathe any portion of his spirit; our controversy whether Pope was a poet; and so much vague effort on the part of our best critics everywhere to express some still unexpressed idea concerning the nature of true poetry; as if they felt in their hearts that a pure glory, nay a divineness, belonged to it, for which they had as yet no name and no intellectual form."[74]

[73] *Ibid.*, I, 34. It does not seem essential to the foregoing discussion to include an analysis of the individual criticism of Wilson, Scott, Lockhart, and Gifford. For Wilson see Saintsbury's *Essays in Literature*, first series, 270–303. Carlyle thought Wilson a "far bigger man" than Jeffrey (*Rem.*, I, 79), but wanting the "central gift." For Scott see *Sir Walter Scott as a Critic of Literature* by Ball, 134–146. The author concludes "that Scott was on the whole an impressionistic critic." For Lockhart see Lang's *Life*, especially Vol. II, chapters XIX and XX. Lang says that Lockhart "had great powers, much knowledge, clear ideas, a good opportunity, but the 'Imp of the Perverse' had dominion over him." Gifford is discussed in Saintbury's *Hist. of Crit.*, III, 286–288.

[74] *Essays*, I, 45. On the Bowles controversy, see also III, 71.

The effort to establish criticism upon a new foundation, by investigating first principles, such as the nature of "true poetry," was represented in England chiefly by four names, already mentioned in the early part of this chapter, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Hazlitt and Lamb. While it is impossible to point out instances of direct indebtedness, Carlyle must have been influenced by these critics, for during the period of his essay writing he was a careful reader of reviews and had an attentive ear for whatever was spoken in literary circles. And with all his contempt and cynical indifference, no man of his day was more curious concerning his fellow craftsmen.[75] At all events there is an interesting agreement between Carlyle and the romantic critics concerning several first principles. To begin with they would endorse, with considerably different emphasis upon the first of them, the two leading doctrines in Carlyle's manifesto, namely, that poetry is to be judged from within, and that it is to be judged according to "universal principles written on the hearts and imaginations of all men." With them, as with Carlyle, criticism is first and last positive, and an effort, therefore, not to censure but to interpret. Carlyle was not more determined than were Coleridge and Hazlitt to break away from criticism by rule and kind, according to the external method. Along with this new approach to the material of criticism there went a new conception of the nature and worth of poetry. The field of poetry, said these critics, is not arbitrarily restricted; the poet is free to choose his subjects where he will, if only he treat them in harmony with principles universal in their application. Poetry is the voice of common humanity, and its appeal is not confined to men of one rank or nationality. In the critical utterances of these writers, poetry is indeed regarded as life, or rather as the essence of it. Their faith in these high matters cannot be regarded as differing from Carlyle's. One and all they believed in the mysterious origin of poetry, as the product of a divine faculty sub-

[75] Carlyle's opinion of these critics is familiar. For Wordsworth see *Rem.*, II, 297–309: for Coleridge, besides the eighth chapter in *Sterling*, see *Froude*, I, 179, 205, 214, 238; *Essays*, II, 184; *Heroes*, 84: for Hazlitt, *Essays*, IV, 28; *Froude*, II, 169; *Corres. with Emerson*, I, 45; *Note-Books*, 213: for Lamb, *Froude*, II, 170; *Rem.*, I, 94; II, 132.

ject to no laws lower than itself; though none of them clung to this conviction with as much seriousness and consistency as did Carlyle. Terms such as imagination and genius occurring so frequently in Wordsworth and so continually in Coleridge and Hazlitt, are equivalent to reason as uniformly used in Carlyle; and all three names denote the higher creative power of the poet to see and body forth truth.

Carlyle's differences from these critics as to both ideals and methods arise chiefly from his closer relation to the Germans and to his own larger view of society. His criticism reaches down into philosophy: his principles have their roots in transcendental idealism. Coleridge is the only other English critic whose principles here and there seem to presuppose the Kantian system, and yet he nowhere succeeds in resting his criticism upon a definite philosophical basis. It follows that Carlyle alone is intent upon the idea, or, interpreted more liberally, the purpose or message of literature, its contribution toward the solution of the enigma of existence. In his criticism therefore he overlooks many important matters, such for example as the distinction between poetry and prose, which Coleridge took up and discussed with incomparable skill and insight. Again in Carlyle the proposition that poetry is life has a far wider meaning than it has in the work of the other romantic critics. With him poetry is not only the "breath and spirit of all knowledge"; it is also the representative of man and society. It assumes for him a social character and significance, very faintly recognized by his contemporaries. The poet for Carlyle is the representative man in whom all movements of his time, the questionings of the *Zeit Geist,* are reflected, are heard. He it is to whom we look for universal truth and for an interpretation of our age in the light of that truth. Carlyle therefore places a far greater emphasis than do Coleridge and Hazlitt upon the historical method. Like Jeffrey both these critics touch this method in a few general remarks, but neither of them gives utterance to any desire or purpose to interpret literature as an expression of the age in which it was created.[76]

[76] For Coleridge, see *Literary Criticism,* 189–191; for Hazlitt, see *Works,* V, 181.

They are content, Hazlitt especially, to point out in a desultory fashion certain general influences of an age upon its literature. Farther they do not go. It follows that the biographical method in criticism receives no attention from these critics, for they regard literature—and it is their great glory—as something apart, a work of art to be appreciated on its own merits and for its own sake. Whereas Carlyle, though he begins with this method, early comes to value poetry chiefly as an index of the writer, a reflection of his character both in itself and as related to its age. Wordsworth and Coleridge, Lamb and Hazlitt remained critics of literature. Carlyle was drawn into biography and history and became a prophet.

CHAPTER IV

Carlyle's Relation to the Literature of Romanticism

It appears from the analysis of Carlyle's literary theories and critical principles in the two preceding chapters that he at all times believed that a mind capable of creating literature must be healthy. By this he meant a mind finely balanced and self-dependent, through which truth shines as through a transparent medium, a mind with all its faculties working harmoniously together for one great object, the revelation in some form of the divine idea. In this article of his faith, as in so many others, Carlyle is at one with Goethe, who in a letter to him says that it has been "at last found most advisable to deduce the development of Morals as well as of Æsthetics out of the whole Complex of healthy human nature."[1] In criticism Carlyle uses the word healthy in the sense he explains in his *Edinburgh Address* (1866), as synonymous with wholeness or holiness of mind. Such an intellect, he says, is "all lucid, and in equilibrium."[2] Such an intellect, moreover, develops its idealism out of actuality, not out of dreams; its belief rests solidly upon experience and always clings to facts and rejects fancies. The truly creative writer is serious, he takes serious views of his art, and makes it an instrument for communicating life, not for exciting a transitory pleasure. His appeal is to serious readers who, he says, ought to furnish minds "active and watchful, not passive and somnolent."[3] Reader as well as writer, if literature is to be worthy of its name and do its work, must be healthy-minded, for health with Carlyle is a word of wide compass and includes a theory of art.

This attitude or faith places Carlyle in opposition, often in

[1] *Corres.*, 79.

[2] *Essays*, VII, 195. Cf. III, 224. Of course Carlyle never accepts the converse of his doctrine, that all healthy minds are great, *e. g.*, Scott.

[3] *Ibid.*, I, 130.

harsh-toned and truculent opposition, to some of the most characteristic literary movements of his time, in a word, to many of the forms of romanticism manifested during the first quarter of the nineteenth century. He is not only against the literature of pleasure in the general sense, but he is opposed to a literature that he regards as proceeding from sham and falsehood, such as novels and plays. He makes no compromise with the whole tribe of cockneys and dilettanti, those apostles of the half-and-half and the artificial. He fulminates against the literature of skepticism and sickliness in which the pale or woe-struck brood of sentimentalists uttered their cries of despair; and he comes to regard himself as a prophet bewailing the flood of unhealthy books that pour from the press of a mechanical and unbelieving generation. But lest it should seem absurd to discuss the hostility of one who was himself a romanticist, we will clear the way for further discussion of his position with a word on the romanticism of Carlyle.

Carlyle is a romanticist in at least four senses.[4] He is one in the first place by virtue of his opposition to the literature of the eighteenth century, at least to that part of it which adhered to classical standards. Though he has much to say of the literary conditions in Germany and England of that period, he regards the situation as limited to no country but as common to all. "Everywhere as in Germany," he says, "there was polish and languor, external glitter and internal vacuity; literature dwelt in a remote conventional world."[5] The creative spirit in Germany, he declares, "had for above a century been almost extinct";[6] and "the past and present aspect of German literature illustrates the literature of England in more than one way. Its history keeps pace with that of ours; for so closely are all European communities connected, that the phases of mind in any one country, so far as these represent its general circumstances and intellectual position, are but modified repeti-

[4] The terms romantic, romanticist and romanticism to designate a spirit in literature or a movement are rare in Carlyle's essays. They do not occur in the essays on Richter and on Novalis. See *Essays*, I, 45, 97; II, 170, 276; III, 71, 161.

[5] *Ibid.*, I, 184.

[6] *Ibid.*, I, 185.

tions of its phases in every other."[7] Frequent parallels are drawn between Germany and England: the Utzes, Gellerts, Cramers, etc., of Germany rank with the Beatties, Logans, Wilkies and Glovers of England and Scotland. In such writers Carlyle professes to find "a certain clear, light, unaffected elegance, to the exclusion of all very deep or genial qualities."[8] Of a period earlier still he says that the Germans had "at best Opitzes, Flemmings, Logaus, as we had our Queen Anne Wits; or, in their Lohensteins, Gryphs, Hoffmannswaldaus, though in inverse order, an unintentional parody of our Drydens and Lees."[9] His opinion even of some of the greatest of English writers of the eighteenth century is extreme. "Our English poet of the period was Goldsmith," he says; "a pure, clear, genuine spirit, had he been of depth or strength sufficient."[10] The poetry of Gray he calls a "laborious mosaic" in which life, feeling, freedom, are sacrificed to pomp and splendor. The prose of Johnson, though true and sound and practical, does not rise above a "prosaic" world.[11] Even Burke is "a resplendent far-sighted Rhetorician rather than a deep sure Thinker."[12] Gathered from various parts of the critical essays, these views point to a uniform attitude of mind. The literature of the eighteenth century everywhere was to Carlyle finished, correct and admirably expressive of taste; but it was likewise cold, conventional and shallow, dwelling remote from "the actual passions, the hopes, sorrows, joys of living men."[13] Because, like the Schlegels or like Wordsworth in their several ways, he sought to liberate literature from this bondage of neo-classicism, Carlyle is always to be regarded as a romanticist.[14]

In the second place Carlyle is to be classed as a member of the new school in so far as romanticism may be identified with

[7] *Ibid.*, I, 57.
[8] *Ibid.*, 42.
[9] *Ibid.*, III, 228.
[10] *Ibid.*, I, 185; cf. I, 42; II, 27.
[11] *Ibid.*, I, 185–6; cf. II, 26–27; VI, 52; *Life of Schiller*, 101.
[12] *Ibid.*, IV, 119.
[13] *Ibid.*, I, 185.
[14] In view of hostile attitude alike in Germany and England at this period toward French literature, it does not seem necessary to dwell on Carlyle's individual opinions (see *Essays*, II, 167–170).

metaphysical, as distinguished from medieval, mysticism. With a mysticism that spent itself in longings for a new catholicism or dwelt apart in a misty dream-world of fairies and hobgoblins, he had nothing to do. But if we take mysticism in the sense of "natural supernaturalism," as it undoubtedly was taken by many writers, we shall find that Carlyle was a devout worshipper at its shrine. His analysis of German mysticism, both in the essay on the *State of German Literature* and in that on *Novalis,* shows that to him it was identical with German metaphysics. "The chief mystics in Germany," he says, "are the Transcendental Philosophers, Kant, Fichte and Schelling."[15] With these thinkers, Carlyle, in so far as he was philosophically minded, was allied from the very first, by nature and by study; and to the end of his life he did not cease to have many moments when the world seemed to him a place of shadows, an abode of flitting phantoms whose real existence belonged to another sphere. To think and to feel in this manner was to unite himself with the new order of thought, not with the old.

Carlyle is romanticist again in his attitude toward the past. His position, however, is independent. He turned frequently and regretfully to the past, more and more indeed as his own age seemed to him mechanical and spiritually dead;[16] but this backward glance was not because he wished to revive the forms and customs, the external life, of a bygone age, nor was it because he thought his own time potentially unromantic. "The Age of Romance," he says, "has not ceased; it never ceases." "Romance exists in Reality alone."[17] His own time, however, seemed to him to reveal only few and fitful glimpses of such romance, and he therefore reverted to the past as the only home of actualities, the realm where real men were to be found whose lives, large and heroic, might serve as patterns to a generation of sentimentalists and skeptics. It is for this reason alone that he praises the novels of Scott; they make the past seem alive. Carlyle in fact does not wish to take his reader out of the present so much as to incite him to

[15] *Ibid.,* I, 62.

[16] Cf. *Ibid.,* IV, 26; *Past and Present* is a document to show this spirit.

[17] *Ibid.,* V, 131, 136.

"wed that old sentiment," of the past "to modern thoughts."[18] His romanticism in this regard, therefore, may be described as didactic-biographical,—certainty quite a different thing from the extreme romanticism of some of the German School.[19]

Finally Carlyle is a romanticist in his rejection of form as an external and fixed thing, determined by rules. As this matter has already been touched in the second chapter, only a brief mention is necessary here. The fullest declaration of the freedom of an artist to choose his own way occurs in the first *Richter,* where Carlyle asserts that while the "beaten paths of literature lead safeliest to the goal," genius after all has privileges of its own and selects its own orbit, which may be never so eccentric, if only it be celestial.[20] A stronger statement to the same effect occurs in the *Helena:* "if an artist," he says, "has conceived his subject in the secret shrine of his own mind, and knows, with a knowledge beyond all power of cavil, that it is true and pure, he may choose his own manner of exhibiting it, and will generally be the fittest to choose it well."[21] Carlyle imposes one condition upon the literary artist—he must have a meaning to express, he must lend to his words the leaven of thought. And thus Carlyle's romanticism swings round to his literary theory. The writer's sole business is to *see* truth, fact, reality, whether in the past or in the present, and he is not to be fettered in his efforts by any arbitrary standards whatsoever. Inasmuch as the literary man of the eighteenth century did not take to his task in this spirit and with this aim, he found little favor from Carlyle.[22]

In order to understand more clearly how it is that Carlyle, though a romanticist himself, is to be found in out and out opposition to so much that is characteristically romantic in German, French and English literature, it may be well to

[18] *Ibid.,* I, 242.

[19] Professor Beers points out that Carlyle preferred the collectivism of the past to the individualism of the present. *Romanticism in the Nineteenth Century,* 382.

[20] *Essays,* I, 16–17. [21] *Ibid.,* I, 128.

[22] See Herford, *Age of Wordsworth,* XXIII, *e. g.,* "Goethe founded that historical or relative æsthetic which measures the merit of a work of art not by its regularity but by its power of expression."

glance again at his position toward Goethe, who stood for him at all times both in literature and life as a "completed man."[23] Goethe is the embodiment of all the ideals which determined the attitude of Carlyle, whose interpretation of the German poet is largely that of a mind that has lived through the fever of doubt and discontent in all its stages and has come forth in "invulnerable health."[24] Regret for the past and despair of the present, as expressed in *Götz* and *Werter,* finally give place to "freedom, belief and clear activity," as expressed in *Wilhelm Meister.*[25] Goethe's mind in these struggles is typical, emblematic. He has passed from diseases common to immature, incompleted, or unhealthy minds, to a condition of mental equilibrium. He lives "in the whole";[26] he is "king of himself and of his world."[27] Hence he becomes "the Uniter, the Reconciler."[28] Goethe's intellect lives and works now within the actual, his ideal rests "on the firm ground of human interest and business, as in its true scene, on its true basis."[29] In the poetry of Goethe, says Carlyle, there is "no looking back into an antique Fairyland"; the "mythologies of bygone days pass only for what they are; we have no witchcraft or magic in the common acceptation"; and heroes are not brought from remote oriental climates, or periods of chivalry.[30] With Heine, Carlyle believed that Goethe's voice scattered the whole brood of ghosts, owls and ravens back to the castles and old bell-towers of the middle ages.[31] What Goethe has to say is valuable therefore for present-day life, a health-restoring medicine for the fevered condition of romantic Europe.[32]

The romanticism that Carlyle sets his face against is in every instance a romanticism that upholds ideals contrary to

[23] *Essays,* IV, 49.
[24] *Ibid.,* IV, 172.
[25] *Ibid.,* I, 210.
[26] *Ibid.,* IV, 50.
[27] *Ibid.,* I, 279.
[28] *Ibid.,* IV, 175.
[29] *Ibid.,* I, 195.
[30] *Ibid.,* I, 55.
[31] *Werke,* V, 246.
[32] Of course I do not mean to imply that Goethe's position toward romanticism is identical with Carlyle's. I mean only to say that Carlyle found in Goethe justification for his own opposition. See Bielschowsky, *Life of Goethe,* III, 143 ff.

those to be found in *Wilhelm Meister,* or in the writings of Goethe's maturity. But though he derived support and direction from Goethe, his attitude was independent because it was temperamental, as is evidenced not only in one or two notable opinions in the early letters, but in the entire literary development of Carlyle as described in our first chapter. The early evidence comes out in connection with two men who stand as prophets or forerunners of the romantic movement in France, Rousseau and Chateaubriand. In 1819 Carlyle expresses disgust with Rousseau's *Confessions* and declares that the book "should teach a virtuous Briton to be content with the dull sobriety of his native country.[33] Three years later he speaks of "the nonsense of *Atala*" and of "the rude, melancholy vastness of that famous work."[34] These early opinions, it may be added, are likewise fairly typical of all that Carlyle had to say of the movement in France. He did not much concern himself with French thought and literature, until he took up Voltaire, when his interest led him into the field of history rather than of literature, and expressed itself in the *Diderot,* the *Diamond Necklace,* the *Mirabeau,* and finally in the great *French Revolution.* Before the period of the essay on Voltaire (1829), there is little to indicate more than a diffused and conventional hostility to the literary and critical standards of France—a hostility in which are heard echoes of the Germans and of Coleridge and Wordsworth. In the preface to *German Romance,* Carlyle alludes again to the "thundery regions of *Atala,*"[35] and in the introduction to *Tieck* there is a clear recognition of literary affairs in France.[36] In the *Voltaire* which appeared two years after Hugo's *Cromwell* (1827) and a year before his *Hernani* (1830), Carlyle expresses some sympathy with the literary revolution then proceeding on the other side of the channel. The French are, he says, "in what may be called the eclectic state; trying all things, German, English, Italian, Spanish, with a candour and real love of improvement, which give the best omens of a still higher suc-

[33] *E. Letters,* 112.
[34] *Ibid.,* 215.
[35] *Ibid.,* I, 229.
[36] *Ibid.,* I, 246.

cess."[37] The interest here is friendly and not hostile, for Carlyle thinks that France now "feels herself called to a more grave and nobler destiny" than she had shown in the previous age, the age of Voltaire and the classicists. But the interest is already late, and Carlyle is drifting from criticism into prophecy. From what we know of his opinion of German and English romanticists, however, we run no risk in affirming that had he discussed Victor Hugo or George Sand, he would have condemned them and the spirit which they represented as heartily as he condemned Byronism in England.[38] His few later references to Chateaubriand and Rousseau show that his attitude toward these men remained what it had been. *Sartor Resartus* may indeed be taken in one aspect as an indignant refutation of Rousseauism, a declaration that society will cast off its old customs only to assume new ones.[39] In the thought of these revolutionary writers Carlyle, early and late, professes to find a rosepink sentimentality, and he turns from them just as he turns from the romanticists in Germany and England.

Toward the romantic movement in Germany his position is more clearly defined. The literature of the storm and stress period excited his aversion, and he would gladly have swept it all into the dust-heap of oblivion. It was created and represented, he thought, by the *Götz* and *Werter* of Goethe, and the *Robbers* of Schiller. It included "the Sentimentalists, the Chivalry-play writers, and the Power-man," and was a literature of desperation and disease.[40] With the new school as a separate and organized movement, of which Tieck and the Schlegels were high priests, Carlyle had a curious, and in some respects a sympathetic interest; and he was well aware of its various manifestations in the literature of the period.[41] He wrote essays on two members of the school, Werner and Novalis, he wrote introductions to the romance of Tieck, Hoffmann and Fouqué, and he discussed in a full-length paper

[37] *Ibid.*, II, 170.
[38] *Froude*, III, 177.
[39] *Sartor*, 40. See also *Essays*, VI, 54; V, 28; *Heroes*, 172–173.
[40] Cf. *Essays*, I, 58, 183, 189, 273; IV, 169.
[41] Cf. *Ibid.*, I, 46, 101, 246.

the *Nibelungen Lied,* the medieval poem perhaps most lauded by the romanticists. He asserts that the principles of the new school were derived from the transcendental system;[42] and in so far as they were he of course finds them nourishing. From this philosophy the romanticists drew their fundamental doctrine of the identity of poetry and life—a doctrine upon which Carlyle's own poetic creed is erected. Poetry, said they, is an expression of the spirit of man wherever it may be found, in ethics, religion, politics, education. All human interests culminate in poetry, and a writer's literary creed must be broad enough to take in man's social relations.[43] Interpreted liberally, this belief commanded Carlyle's support, but his application of it to actual social conditions was widely different.

In fact Carlyle did not follow the movement beyond the sphere of philosophical principles. His introductions to Tieck, Hoffmann and Fouqué show an indifference to their work, or at most a very lukewarm interest in it.[44] Though these writers belonged to the new school, Carlyle does not attempt to relate them to it, and there is confessedly something second-hand in many of his judgments upon their books. He has not read Tieck's *William Lovell,* a production highly typical of certain tendencies, nor does he even mention such out and out romanticists as Brentano or von Arnim. He is interested in Friedrich Schlegel not as the author of *Lucinde,* another book steeped in romantic extravagances and not mentioned by Carlyle, but as the interpreter of transcendentalism and as in some sense a religious mystic.[45] As for Werner, Carlyle confesses that he seeks "chiefly for his religious creed,"[46] and looks for some glimmering of truth through the confused jungle of Werner's writings.[47] We cannot think of Carlyle as

[42] *Ibid.,* I, 44, 246.

[43] See Brandes, *Main Currents,* II, 68; Beers, *XIX Century,* 135.

[44] *Essays,* I, 242–3, 249, 261–2.

[45] *Characteristics* was in part inspired by Schlegel's *Philosophische Vorlesungen;* see *Essays,* IV, 28, 31. [46] *Ibid.,* I, 88.

[47] The Catholic tendencies of Werner, of the younger Stalberg and F. Schlegel, Carlyle nowhere sympathizes with, but he rather lamely tries to explain them; see *Essays, e. g.,* I, 123; also I, 31, 101, 118.

sympathizing with the excesses into which the younger romanticists descended. He who speaks of the dissolute life, the "Asiatic reverie"[48] of Werner, and of the jack o'lantern personages in his dramas;[49] he who in spite of his liking for the metaphysical mysticism of Novalis, can yet speak of that typical young romantic dreamer as *passive,* as coming before us "in a sort of Asiatic character,"[50] would be little likely to find pleasure in the wilder flights of these and other members of the school. What in Novalis and Hoffmann was *Rosenschein* and *Purpurglut* to Heine[51] would be charmed moonshine and rosepink bedizenment to Carlyle. It was not in him to share in the desire of the romanticists to hold a festival of the senses, to play fast and loose with the ego, or to disintegrate the spiritual self into a hundred fantastic or grotesque shapes. Carlyle held fast to the unity of the higher self. His romanticism kept to the deeper channels of thought and was not drawn into the eddies of psychology or the muddy flats of pathology, as much of the German romanticism came to be.

How strictly Carlyle's interest is limited to the interpretative side of romanticism is shown in his treatment of Goethe's *Helena* and *Mährchen,* Werner's dramas, and the *Nibelungen Lied,* in one and all of which, though romantic in different ways, he looks for "meanings."[52] Perhaps his attitude is nowhere more strikingly displayed than in his contrasted handling of the *Heldenbuch* and the *Lied.* The first, Carlyle calls a shaggy wilderness and enchanted wood where haunt "a chaotic brood of Fire-drakes, Giants, and malicious turbaned Turks."[53] The *Lied* itself, which Heine says was once all the talk of the romantic school,[54] is a "fair garden of poesy," a "free field open for legitimate perennial interests," in which the marvels are few and there is "a real, rounded, habitable Earth."[55]

[48] *Ibid.,* I, 123.
[49] *Ibid.,* I, 109.
[50] *Ibid.,* II, 227.
[51] Heine, *Werke,* V, 302.
[52] *Essays,* I, 98, 128; III, 129; IV, 222. With the symbolism of Werner Carlyle has no sympathy (I, 109). With that of Goethe he has what I should call but a feeble sympathy. Cf. I, 171, 225. Though a symbolist himself in the transcendental sense, he was generally averse to literary symbolism.
[53] *Ibid.,* III, 127–129.
[54] *Werke,* V, 315.
[55] *Essays,* III, 129–130.

That is to say, in so far as romanticism seeks to bring the ideal down to the actual, not to lift the actual into a lunar world of fantasy and grotesquery, Carlyle will be found in hearty agreement with it, for then its mission corresponds exactly with his idea of the mission of all literature.

The romantic movement in England was nearer to Carlyle, it was creative rather than interpretative, it steered clear of transcendentalism, and it did not, except ineffectually in Wordsworth and Shelley, attempt to relate itself as a constructive force to life and society. For all these reasons as well as for reasons of temperament, Carlyle took a far more determined stand against English romanticism than he did against German. His position is shown in scattered remarks upon nearly all of the chief actors in the new drama, but it is most evident in what he has to say of Scott and Byron, whose works he frequently refers to as the leading products of the "Mosstrooper and Satanic Schools."[56]

Next to Goethe and Burns, Byron, as has been said, was the poet who most drew the attention of Carlyle. He is referred to again and again in the *Essays,* and his brilliant and wayward career is the wearisomely iterated text for a dozen sermons. Carlyle was fascinated by Byron's genius. Froude quotes an extract from a letter to Miss Welsh, in which Carlyle laments in a highly emotional strain the death of the poet and speaks of him as the "noblest spirit in Europe," who had sunk before his course was half run.[57] A few years later (1830) he writes to Napier, then editor of the *Edinburgh Review,* offering an essay on Byron as soon as Moore's second volume of the *Life* should appear. Carlyle urges the matter again after two years, but Napier, fearful of what Carlyle might say, turned the subject over to Macaulay.[58] Though we have lost what probably would have been a notable contribution to the study of Byron and certainly a Carlyle document of extreme interest, we can be pretty certain from numerous incidental opinions what direction the proposed review would have taken.[59] Some

[56] *Ibid.,* IV, 169. [57] *Froude,* I, 173.

[58] *Shepherd,* I, 74–75, 104.

[59] In his second letter to Napier, Carlyle says of Byron: "His fame has been very great, but I see not how it is to endure; neither does that

of the opinions in the earlier essays testify to an interest tempered with sympathy. In the introduction to Tieck, Carlyle says that "our own noble and hapless Byron perished from among us at the instant when his deliverance seemed at hand."[60] In the *Burns* he asserts that "Byron has a poet's soul, and strives towards the Infinite and the Eternal."[61] Such favorable comments are all alike in one respect—they express Carlyle's judgment that Byron's life was incomplete and that he died before he could solve the enigma of existence as it was solved by Goethe in *Wilhelm Meister*. Unlike Schiller and Goethe, Byron did not survive his storm and stress period, but perished while passing through it.[62] That he was destined to conquer himself and his world, Carlyle seems to have had no doubt; as is proved by his frequent praise of Byron's poetical endowment and by his significant critical remark on the last of Byron's poems, *Don Juan*, of which he says that it is, especially the latter part of it, perhaps "the only thing approaching to a *sincere* work, he ever wrote.[63] Except Goethe, Byron was the only one of his contemporaries of whom Carlyle spoke with so much favor.

But while he was deeply moved by the tragedy in Byron's life and work, and reflected regretfully upon what the poet might have accomplished, Carlyle's opinion of his poetry, of Byronism that is, rarely varied from what he wrote as early as 1821 in a review of Joanna Baillie's *Metrical Legends*. Though he does not there mention the poet by name, he unmistakably refers to Byronism in such phrases as ruffians, oriental gorgeousness, diseased melancholy, frenzies of despair, etc.—all manifestations of the British Werter. Later opinions are more extreme, and sometimes violent, but to the last they indicate that Byron was the prototype of those English senti-

make *him* great. No genuine productive thought was ever revealed by him to mankind; indeed, no clear undistorted vision into anything, or picture of anything; but all had a certain falsehood, a brawling, theatrical, insincere character."

[60] *Ibid.*, I, 244.
[61] *Ibid.*, II, 50.
[62] *Ibid.*, I, 59, 211, 213; IV, 188.
[63] *Ibid.*, II, 11.

mentalists who did not emerge from sickly self-consciousness into healthy unconsciousness of self.[64]

If Byron cursed the present, Scott uttered regrets for the past; and the author of *Waverley* succeeded no better than did the author of *Childe Harold* in investing his work with transcendental meanings. Carlyle early pointed out the relationship between Götz and Scott's romances, prose and metrical, and he invariably classed Scott's work with the chivalry drama of Goethe.[65] With these general opinions the essay on Scott is in full agreement. Sir Walter's entrance into literature, Carlyle says, was singularly fortunate. It was "an age fallen into spiritual languor, destitute of belief," an age in which "a Hayley was the main singer."[66] Inevitably the man who carried the "reader back to rough strong times, wherein those maladies of ours had not yet arisen," was hailed with warm welcome and became the "song-singer and pleasant tale-teller to Britain and Europe, in the beginning of the artificial nineteenth century."[67] But since "literature *has* other aims than that of harmlessly amusing indolent languid men," the sick heart of the age will find no healing in the romances of Walter Scott. He who has no message to give cannot be trusted to cure the fever of the soul.[68]

From Scott, out and away king of the romantics, as Stevenson named him, the transition is easy to the romantic drama and to fiction in general; for Carlyle regarded the Waverley

[64] *Last Words,* 128; *Essays,* I, 189; II, 10–11, 248; III, 35; IV, 177; VI, 54.

[65] *Collectanea,* 91; *Essays,* I, 273, 183; IV, 169; VI, 53.

[66] *Ibid.,* VI, 52. [67] *Ibid.,* VI, 38.

[68] It does not seem necessary to comment specially on Carlyle's opinion of Keats, Shelley, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Hazlitt and De Quincey. For Keats see *Burns,* II, 18; *Froude,* III, 384. Casting a glance at Keats, Carlyle says that "Johnson was no man to be killed by a review" (*Essays,* IV, 114). For Shelley see IV, 28 (also Hazlitt), and *Rem.,* II, 293; for Coleridge (Carlyle everywhere regards the later Coleridge not the author of *The Ancient Mariner* and *Christabel*), see *Life of Schiller,* 100; *Sterling,* ch. VIII; for Wordsworth see *Life of Schiller,* 153; *Essays,* I, 181; *Rem.,* Vol. II, 297–309. Note the phrases, "poor, moaning, monotonous Macpherson" (*Essays,* III, 242); "slight bravura dash of the fair tuneful Hemens," "truthful severity of Crabbe's style" (*Ibid.,* IV, 199).

Novels as only a higher species of the whole genus called literature of amusement. He did not care for plays and he rarely went to the theater. When he was translating *Wilhelm Meister* in 1823 he wrote in disgust to a friend of the endless talk in that book about players and their sorry pasteboard apparatus; and even in his preface he did not shrink from referring to the "everlasting disquisitions about plays and players."[69] In the same year he records that he could not read a single play of the old dramatists—"Massinger, Beaumont and Fletcher etc.—to an end without disgust."[70] This feeling naturally deepens into loathing, when he comes to consider the romantic drama of the nineteenth century, as he does in the essay on *German Playwrights.* Throughout the discussion there runs the distinction between the dramatist and the playwright, before referred to. The latter is the target for Carlyle's sharpest sarcasms. His attitude toward his subject is amusing. He is entering a "low province" in the interest of a "sound study of Foreign Literature"; he confesses that his knowledge of his ground is "in the highest degree limited," and that he will take "one brief shy glance" and "leave it, probably for many years."[71] He turns away accordingly with the concluding remark that he wishes to wander over the "Elysian Fields of German Literature," not to watch "the gloomy discords of its Tartarus."[72] He brushes aside the whole tribe of Grillparzers, Klingemanns and Müllners as so many poor mechanical prosaists, who possess no philosophy of life and have no word of wisdom. Kotzebue is elsewhere picturesquely described as "a lifeless bundle of dyed rags."[73] The English playwrights—the "Knowleses, Maturins, Shiels

[69] *E. Letters,* 286; *Essays,* I, 225.

[70] *Note-Books,* 32. It is safe to say that Carlyle cared little for any dramatic writers except Shakespeare, Schiller and Goethe. Some of his early opinions of Schiller's dramas show the extravagance of immature judgment (see *Life of Schiller,* 131, 132, 153). He read Molière, but he says that "France never rose into the sphere of Schiller even in the days of Corneille" (*Life of Schiller,* 131). This early opinion is supported by later judgments (*Essays,* I, 15; II, 167). See his remarks on Lope de Vega and Calderon (*History of Literature,* 119–120).

[71] *Essays,* II, 88.

[72] *Ibid.,* II, 118.

[73] *Ibid.,* III, 245; cf. VI, 32.

and Shees"—are of the same sort, though their popularity is a little run out and they stand forlorn "like firs on an Irish bog."[74]

Carlyle would have been glad to banish romantic novels to a place more forlorn than an Irish bog, had it been in his power to do so. Their name was legion and their baleful influence penetrated everywhere. To guide us to his position toward the fiction of his day and earlier, we have nothing better than a paragraph in the preface to *German Romance.* wherein the opinion is both early and characteristic. The novel is the work, he says, not of an artist but of a manufacturer, and is therefore "among the simplest forms of composition." Though there are a few novelists of high order, "a few Poets" among them, there are "whole legions and hosts of Poetasters," who in Germany and elsewhere have made the sentimental novel and the Gothic romance a "mountain of falsehood."[75]

Carlyle regards the novels of Goethe and Richter as the product of poets, and he excludes these from the condemnation he was so ready to bring down upon the rest. His opinions of their work in fiction are especially valuable as showing how he considers it hardly at all from the point of view of what we should call legitimate novel-interest—plot, characters, situations—but for entirely different reasons. "The two Books named Novels," he says of the two parts of *Wilhelm Meister,* "come not under the Minerva-Press Category, nor the Ballantyne-Press Category."[76] Not for their "romance interest," but for their philosophy, their literary criticism, their varied and deep thoughts on religion and life, are these celebrated German fictions esteemed.[77] It is the same with Richter, except that in Richter Carlyle finds also a congenial humor which he describes with a good deal of minuteness. He does not like what in Jean Paul's day constituted the "novel interest" of these strange pieces, their oriental extravagance, their fantastic exaggeration, overflowing abundance and lyrical

[74] *Ibid.,* II, 86.

[75] *Ibid.,* I, 229. The separate introductions, especially to Tieck, Fouqué and Hoffmann, reveal no liking for their fiction. Cf. I, 32.

[76] *Ibid.,* I, 286; cf. I, 198. [77] *Ibid.,* I, 225, 226, 284.

diffuseness; but he likes the life in them, their never-omitted meaning.[78]

Carlyle's firm and unchanging insistence upon realism in art[79] explains his faint and his sometimes less than faint sympathy with two English novelists of the eighteenth century, Fielding and Sterne, to whom we may turn for a moment in passing on to the romantic fiction of the next century. Fielding's *Tom Jones* seems to have stood to him as the highest type of what he calls "our common English notion of the Novel."[80] Sterne he places higher than Fielding, if we may judge from the more frequent and more favorable notices of him. The humor in *Tristram Shandy* awoke answering echoes in Carlyle's nature and he warmed to Uncle Toby and the other members of that eccentric family.[81]

It was the English romantic fiction of a later day that came under Carlyle's censure, a censure sometimes ironical, often savage, but always vigorous and earnest. He divides all fiction of this type into three or four groups, whose names recur often in his criticism—the Minerva, the Ballantyne and the Colburn novels (so called from the name or proprietor of the press), and the fashionable novels. Lowest in their kind were the works of the Gothic school, those of Mrs. Radcliffe, Mrs. Shelley, Monk Lewis and Beckford, together with *Tom and Jerry,* a dramatized version of Pierce Egan's popular cockney production.[82] A little less low, perhaps, were the fashionable novels, of which Disraeli's *Vivian Grey* (1826) and Bulwer's *Pelham* (1828) were the most shining and popular examples. These fictions were all the rage when Carlyle was writing *Sartor,* and he unmistakably refers to them as the sacred books of

[78] *Ibid.,* I, 267, 265; cf. II, 183–4. [79] *Ibid.,* IV, 58.

[80] *Ibid.,* I, 231. It is in this sense that the word novel is applied to Richter. For Fielding, further, see I, 229, 284; IV, 58.

[81] *Ibid.,* I, 15, 237, 266; II, 20, 167. Cervantes was a favorite of Carlyle's; he calls him "the purest of all humorists" (I, 15). Rabelais he does not appear to have liked (I, 261); Montaigne he did (I, 15). Richardson he considers sentimental, and he dismisses Goldsmith with a casual comment or two (I, 233, 42, 185; see also on Richardson and Defoe, II, 17).

[82] *Ibid.,* I, 32, 261; II, 12–13; III, 65, 242; VI, 70.

dandies who haunt Almacks, a "Jewish temple" where the leading preacher and teacher *Pelham* holds forth.[83] Still higher up, but not entering the ranks of literature, were the Waverley Novels. But even Scott, when he attempts the heroic, "which is but seldom the case, falls almost at once, into the rose-pink sentimental—descries the Minerva Press from afar."[84] On all sides Carlyle regards the novelists of his day as dealing with sham and unreality, and he deliberately brands their work as false. In his essay on *Biography* he says significantly that the "highest exercise of Invention has, in very deed, nothing to do with Fiction; but is an invention of new Truth, what we can call a Revelation."[85] With invention in the sense used in imaginative fiction Carlyle has next to no interest, whether we take his work of 1823, when he was translating *Wilhelm Meister,* or of 1837, when unhappily he was criticising the novels of Scott.

It matters not where we look into the writings of Carlyle, his fundamental attitude remains fixed. Our survey of the field of romantic literature so far as it was explored by him—and he knew pretty clearly what was going forward in Germany, France and England—shows that he searched his field, as he searched all others, for some traces of transcendental truth, and that where he found none he regarded the territory as barren or nearly so. The earliest and most extreme manifestations of romanticism, whether the oriental reveries of Werner and Novalis, the operatic sentimentalities of Rousseau, or the spectral and bloody business of the Gothic novels, Carlyle never spoke of but to ridicule or condemn; and Byronism first and last roused him to something like invective. But when romanticism in its later stages developed in the direction of realism, and shook off some of the earlier extravagances, he expressed now and again a feeling of sympathy. For Carlyle was, as he himself says in *Sterling,* a stubborn realist.[86] We have seen that he found some merit in the great realists of the

[83] *Sartor,* 192–3. See also *Essays,* I, 184; II, 126; IV, 63, 163. Carlyle once proposed to Napier to write "a sort of sally on Fashionable Novels." Shepherd, I, 80.

[84] *Ibid.,* VI, 70.

[85] *Ibid.,* IV, 59.

[86] *Life of Sterling,* 180.

eighteenth century, and we may contrast if we will his opinions of Schiller's early and later dramas.[87] He believed that Byron at the time of his death was emerging from Byronism, and he referred to the sincerity of *Don Juan.* Almost his only word of praise for Scott was that Scott made the past seem a reality and not merely a place for lay figures dressed in antiquated clothes. Let literature show some glimmer of truth, and Carlyle finds in it something to praise; let it dally never so little with what he regards as sham or falsehood and he is swift to pronounce his sentence of blame.

[87] *Life of Schiller, e. g.,* 19 and 153.

CHAPTER V

Carlyle's Place in the Introduction of German Literature Into England

Before considering certain of Carlyle' essays as illustrations of the application of his ideals to individual writers, it will be necessary to take some preliminary notice of his position as an introducer of German literature into England. If we even faintly appreciate the ignorance, not to say the stupid prejudice, of the English mind toward German literature for the first quarter of the century, and if we remind ourselves of the great and almost unaided efforts of Carlyle for nearly fifteen years thereafter to break down prejudice and leave no excuse for ignorance, we shall understand how incomplete the present study would be without some consideration of his place among the English pioneers who made the names of Schiller and Goethe known to their countrymen. Beyond a doubt Carlyle was the first really great interpreter of German thought to the English people. Out of thirty-four separate titles in the critical essays down to 1839 (that is, to *Chartism*), half are upon German subjects: and to these must be added not only several articles now figuring as appendices, but also the *Life of Schiller*, the translation of *Wilhelm Meister* and of specimens of *German Romance*. Much of this work was done in spite of criticism so sneering as to dismay a purpose weaker than Carlyle's. He was called a German mystic, and was laughed at for worshipping strange divinities from over the seas. And yet he went on writing German reviews, partly of course because he made a living in that way, but partly because he was determined to prove to his readers that a new literature had grown up, so great, so life-giving, that they could not afford to remain in ignorance of it. How much the England of his and a later day owes to his literary labors in this field

will become clearer if we glance at the situation as it was before Carlyle's influence began to tell.

Up to the time of William Taylor of Norwich, German literature was little better than unknown in Great Britain. A few translations had appeared, most of them from lesser writers and many in mutilated versions from the French, but these failed to awaken a deep or permanent interest. Brandl speaks of *Gessner's Idyls* as the "first offspring of the German muse which, under the Royal House of Hanover, found a welcome in England."[1] At the same time (1762) there appeared the *Death of Abel* by the same author, followed a year later by a translation of Klopstock's *Messiah* and *Death of Adam*. Bodner's *Noachide* belongs to 1767, and there were versions of Wieland in 1771 and 1773. The latter year saw also a translation of Lessing's *Fables,* which was succeeded in 1781 by a prose version of *Nathan* and in 1786 by a production of his *Minna von Barnhelm* on the London stage as the *Disbanded Officer*. Lessing won no popularity however before 1800. In 1779 came the first English translation of *Werter* from the French. This novel was twice translated during the next ten years, and between 1784 and 1792 no fewer than nine continuations and paraphases were published.[2] More than ten years elapsed before Schiller became much known, and by this time the influence of William Taylor and others was beginning to be felt.[3]

[1] *Life of Coleridge,* 123.

[2] Herzfeld, *William Taylor von Norwich,* 11.

[3] Taylor refers to an English translation of the *Robbers,* "executed, it is believed, by H. Mackenzie, Esq., of Edinburgh"; and he quotes from "the original edition of 1781" (*Historic Survey,* III, 174). I can find no mention of such a translation by Mackenzie, who certainly did not know German in 1781, and probably not even in 1788 (see *Dict. Nat. Biog.,* Vol. XXXV, 151). Lockhart speaks of the services to German of Alexander Fraser Tytler. "His version of Schiller's *Robbers,*" says Lockhart, "was one of the earliest from the German theatre" (*Life of Scott,* I, 234, ed. Boston, 1861). It is possible that Taylor has mistaken Mackenzie for Tytler, though I have not been able to verify Lockhart's statement.

In 1795 came Schiller's *Cabal and Love,* in 1798 his *Don Carlos,* and in 1800 his *Wallenstein* (by Coleridge).

Taylor deserves the distinction of being the first man in England to awaken any interest in modern German literature. His critical ability was slightly above mediocre but he exerted an important influence upon some of his contemporaries, whose united efforts contributed not a little to open the way for Carlyle. Taylor spent the summer of 1782 in Germany, visited Weimar (though it is uncertain whether he saw Goethe), gained a sound knowledge of the language of Germany and came back with a love for its literature that continued through life. It was his unpublished translation of Bürger's *Lenore* which stirred Scott's interest in German ballads of the diablerie kind; and which, when published in 1796, played so interesting a part in early romanticism. In 1791, Taylor's versified version of Lessing's *Nathan* appeared, and two years later his *Iphigenie,* the first translation of Goethe's classical drama into English—which as late as 1828 Crabb Robinson regarded as the best English version of Goethe's longer poems.[4] For more than five and twenty years Taylor was a contributor to the *Monthly Magazine* and *Monthly Review,* writing some hundred and thirty articles of all sorts. Many of these were translations from the German and were subsequently collected in the *Historic Survey.* For a considerable period after 1811, Taylor's interest in German literature lulled somewhat, though he was now recognized even by the *Edinburgh Review* as the "head of all our translators" from the German.[5] In 1830 he published his *Historic Survey of German Poetry* in three volumes, a work which his friends had long urged him to produce and which remains a record of his contribution to the spread of German literature in England. The *Survey* has a unique interest, for it is the most important representative of English opinions on German literature prior to Carlyle. Taylor's literary judgments rarely rise out of the commonplace and they are sometimes absurdly erroneous, as in the case of Kotzebue, whose popularity in Europe, however, about 1800, was so dazzling as to blind nearly every critic to his faults. To Kotzebue Taylor devotes almost as many pages as to Goethe, and he gives more to Wieland than to both together. In order to taste

[4] *Diary,* II, 53.

[5] *Ed. Review,* VIII, 154.

his quality and to understand what Philistine opinion it was that Carlyle tried to break down, we may call attention to one or two of Taylor's comments concerning the work of Goethe. Of *Faust* he says:

"Though not the best work of Goethe, it is the most singular, fantastic and impressive. The pious complain of its profaneness, the modest of its obscenity, the virtuous of its moral indifference, and the studious of its contemptuous satires on learning and acquirement: yet all allow that it has attraction and significance; that it displays a deep insight into the causes and motives of human conduct; and that, in the midst of its farcical marvels, it preserves a naturalness of delineation, which gives even to the impossible a certain impression of reality. Everyone forbids it to be read, yet each in his turn reads it."[6]

Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship he calls a "tedious planless novel," and Meister's "*Peregrinations,*" he says, shows a "senile garrulity,"[7] phrases which seem also to reflect the judgment of a day much later than Taylor's.

Among those whom Taylor's zeal inspired to study the

[6] *Survey,* III, 323.

[7] *Ibid.,* 348, 362. Taylor was probably administering an antidote to what seemed to him the infatuated eulogy of Carlyle, who is alluded to farther on: "The more recent works of Goethe have been surveyed with copious elegance, and exuberance of detail, by a contributor to the early numbers of the *Foreign Review.* To me they do not appear to merit so unqualified a panegyric, such lofty praise, as is there given" (*Ibid.,* 378).

The influence of Monk Lewis and Scott deserves mention. The services of Lewis are limited to his tales of wonder and terror and to a few plays and romances adopted or translated from the German. He visited Weimer in 1792 and was introduced to Goethe. For a time he was a most important stimulator of the great vogue of German ghost, robber, and knight-romances and tales, but his place in the promotion of the higher class of German literature does not appear to be significant. He must have exercised some influence, however, in a personal way, as for example in his reading *Faust* to Byron. Scott's relations to Germany are well-known and of more account perhaps than those of Lewis. But even Scott can scarcely take rank among the enthusiastic students of German. His translation of Goethe's *Götz* is referred to by Taylor "as admirably translated into English in 1799 at Edinburgh by William Scott advocate," etc. (*Survey,* III, 243). Aside from his ballad translations and that of *Götz,* his relation to German literature is to be found mainly in some few traces in his novels,—*The Monastery, Kenilworth, Ivanhoe, Peveril of the Peak* for examples—and not in any work of a critical character, except an article on Hoffmann in the *Quarterly Review* for July, 1827 (see Ball, *Scott as a Critic of Literature,* 104–5).

higher German literature was Henry Crabb Robinson, a name to be remembered for its place among the early admirers of Schiller and Goethe. In 1798 Robinson records that "the most eventful occurrence of the year was an introduction to William Taylor of Norwich, who encouraged me in a growing taste for German literature."[8] Two years later he made his first trip to Germany, where he remained five years, studying at Jena and enjoying there and elsewhere contact with cultivated Germans. He was much at Weimer during its most flourishing peroid and saw Goethe, Schiller, Wieland and Kotzebue. He heard *Wallenstein's Death* at the Weimer theatre and apparently was favored with many opportunities to view the intellectual circle at close range. While at Weimer during this first visit, Robinson became a contributor to the *Monthly Register*. "The subjects on which I wrote," he says, "were German literature, the philosophy of Kant, etc. I also gave many translations from Goethe, Schiller and others, in order to exemplify the German theory of versification." But for the most part "I unaffectedly declare that they attracted no notice, and did not deserve any."[9] It was not indeed what he wrote but what he talked that made Robinson's influence important in the introduction of German thought to England. No other Englishman of his time could boast of so much acquaintance with the higher literary circles of Germany. He made in all six visits, upon the third of which in 1829 he spent five evenings with Goethe.[10] He met Tieck and later A. W. Schlegel, when they were in London. He was therefore solidly equipped to talk on German subjects, and he did so most assiduously for many years, if we may judge from the conversations on Schiller, Goethe and others recorded in his *Diary*. English opinion, as he seems to have encountered it, was almost uniformly hostile, and it was not until well into the thirties, that is to say when Carlyle's essays were beginning to be read, that Robinson began to find the old prejudice giving way. His recorded talks with Coleridge, for example, show Coleridge's rather habitual attitude of opposition, especially to

[8] *Diary*, I, 24. [9] *Ibid.*, 72.

[10] Goethe had previously sent Robinson two medals in testimony of his devotion to German literature.

Goethe. The general tenor is suggested in a single instance: Coleridge conceded to Goethe, says Robinson, "universal talent, but felt a moral life to be the defect of his poetry."[11]

Coleridge might have done for German literature what Carlyle did later. He possessed the genius and the equipment. In 1797 he had begun to learn German and a year later he made his trip to Germany with the Wordsworths. There he plunged into Lessing's works, first for theological purposes, and read him through, and very soon proposed to translate him into English.[12] But most of Coleridge's plans ended in talk, except his splendid translations of Schiller's *Piccolomini* and *Wallenstein's Death,* which, though neglected by the many, showed to the few what he was capable of doing for German literature in England. His activities in literature soon gave way to a wide wandering in the fields of German philosophy, and for the last twenty-five years of his life he was not an influence favorable to Schiller and Goethe. At no time in fact was he an influence at all commensurate with his genius and knowledge. Besides Coleridge there was another man who possessed genius and had considerable knowledge of German, De Quincey. Two papers by him on Lessing's *Laöcoon,* and another on Kant appeared in *Blackwood's* in 1826 and 1827. But he first announced himself as a student and critic of German writers in the pages of the *London Magazine,* in which in 1821 he published an essay on Richter and some "analects." In 1823 he brought out a short paper on Herder, and more "analects" from Richter. De Quincey has undisputed claim to the title of introducer of Richter to the English public, his first paper antedating Carlyle's by six years. But whoever wishes to test at first hand the superiority of Carlyle over De Quincey as an interpreter of Jean Paul should compare the solid, orderly opinions of the one with the jumbled, capricious opinions of the other. De Quincey and Coleridge were the two men, it should seem, who ought to have done more than any others before Carlyle to win a secure place for German literature in England. But Coleridge's plans and promises evaporated in talk, and De Quincey's brilliant detached efforts were not backed by the requisite firmness of mind. It is

[11] *Ibid.,* 160. [12] *Brandl,* 239–249.

doubtful, therefore, if the actual contemporary influence of these writers among cultivated people was anything like so great as that of Taylor and Robinson.[13]

Nothing so well shows how difficult it was to make a gap in the "Chinese Wall of antiquated prejudices" which divided England from Germany as the attitude of the great periodicals. For the first thirty years of the century the review that held most aloof from German thought was the *Edinburgh*. If not actually hostile, it maintained a position of condescension, supported by inexhaustible ignorance. In its pages appeared reviews of Madame de Staël's *Germany*, Schlegel's *Lectures*, Lord Gower's translation of *Faust*, Goethe's *Dichtung und Wahrheit* and Carlyle's translation of *Wilhelm Meister*. From its high place it looked down and sneered at the so-called exaggeration, clumsiness, and barbarity of German writers, and it never failed to be shocked at that "monster in literature," Goethe's *Faust*.[14] The ignorance, the "blessed self complacence" and the "*de haut en bas*" position of the Edinburgh was vigoriously opposed by Blackwood's.[15] Lockhart's early connection with the review is the source of much of its friendliness to the Germans and to Goethe in particular. In 1817, the year of *Blackwood's* inception, Lockhart made a tour to Germany, met Goethe, and returned with something like reverence for the best German literature.[16] In the early numbers of the magazine there are many traces of Lockhart's hand in translations from Schiller, Bürger, Körner, Haller and Goethe, as well as in various critical remarks which not only show the young reviewer's liking for *Faust*, but also his fondness for picking a quarrel with the *Edinburgh*.[17] *Blackwood's* did indeed do more by translations than by critical reviews to dispel English

[13] Robinson's enthusiasm for the Germans was as coldly received by Lamb, Southey and Wordsworth as it was by Coleridge. Cf. *Diary*, II, 137; 79; Knight, *Life of Wordsworth*, II, 324; Wordsworth's *Prose Works*, Gosart ed., III, 436. Shelley had doubtless little to do with the spread of German literature in England, but he was himself a reader of German works and was deeply moved by *Faust*. He read Schlegel's *Lectures* in 1818 (Dowden, *Life*, I, 472; II, 187).

[14] *E. Review*, Vol. LII, 252.

[15] *Blackwood's*, III, 213.

[16] Lang, *Life of Lockhart*, I, 118–119.

[17] *Blackwood's, e. g.*, IV, 211; VII, 235.

ignorance of German writers. These translations appeared in a series called *Horæ Germanicæ* which up to 1830 ran to 25 numbers. But even these papers could not have done much to foster sound intelligent notions of the great works of Germany, for they were mostly concerned with the romantic dramas of Müllner, Grillparzer, Körner and the romances of Baron and Baroness Fouqué. *The Quarterly Review* must have done even less, as should be inferred from its Tory sympathies. It takes a somewhat middle ground between the *Edinburgh* and *Blackwood's,* neither opposing nor favoring, but condescendingly tolerating German literature in perfunctory criticism. From 1809, a year after its establishment, to 1831, it published but three articles on German subjects worth mentioning, a review of Madame de Staël's *Germany,* of Schlegel's *Lectures* and of Lord Gower's translation of *Faust* and fragments of *Faust* by Shelley. It witnesses to the widespread ignorance of German literature, and it does not hesitate to say that *Faust* "may be read without danger though not without a painful feeling."[18]

Turn in what direction we will for light upon German literature in England during the first quarter of the century, we find that the intellectual horizon is heavily clouded with ignorance and prejudice, only an ineffectual ray breaking through here and there. In the highest circles knowledge on this subject was in most cases little better than superficial; worse still, such knowledge was so steeped in condescension and cant as to be of little help in diffusing any genuine admiration for the greatest writers, Lessing, Richter, Schiller and Goethe. A gap in the dead wall of English insularity was made by a foreign book, Madame de Staël's *Germany,* of which Carlyle said that it "must be regarded as the precursor, if not parent, of whatever acquaintance with German literature exists among us."[19] But the greatest force of all was undoubtedly Carlyle himself, whose essays on German subjects, for this service alone, ought to entitle him to a secure position in English

[18] *Quarterly,* Vol. X, 390. For a brief analysis of the positions of the earlier periodicals—the *Monthly Review* and the *Anti-Jacobin*—see Perry, *German Influence in English Literature, Atlantic Monthly* for August, 1877.

literary criticism of the nineteenth century. He it was who possessed the insight, knowledge and necessary courage to fight against a many-voiced and persistent opposition. From the first he understood the attitude in England toward German literature, as the introductory paragraphs in his preface to *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* clearly show.[20] He offers his *German Romance* as a small taper in total darkness.[21] He complains in 1827 that German literature is not only generally unknown, but misknown, since false and tawdry instead of genuine wares have been imported.[22] But by 1830 we note a change, for, though Carlyle then and thereafter complained of English ignorance, he now began to discover a certain recognition of Germany. Richter has "his readers and admirers,"[23] and knowledge of Schiller's works is "silently and rapidly proceeding."[24] In 1832 he claims for Goethe some shadow of recognition, notably among the "younger, more hopeful minds."[25] And as late as 1838 he hopes that Germany is no longer a land of gray vapor and chimeras, "as it was to most Englishmen, not many years ago."[26] His hopes were indeed beginning to be realized, for both England and America through the influence of his efforts, were becoming interested in Germany. His position as a prophet, if not as a critic, of Goethe is preëminent. For years England looked to Carlyle as its greatest interpreter of the German poet, and men so different as Matthew Arnold and George Henry Lewes acknowledged their obligation. And if in recent times methods of criticism as to Goethe have changed greatly (since it has been the fashion to approach his work on different sides rather than as a whole) no critic can fail to recognize the substantial and pioneer service which Carlyle rendered to make his favorite poet known to his countrymen.[27]

[20] *Essays*, II, 265.
[21] *Ibid.*, I, 223.
[22] *Ibid.*, 231.
[23] *Ibid.*, 26; cf. 131, 176.
[24] *Ibid.*, III, 3.
[25] *Ibid.*, 71.
[26] *Ibid.*, IV, 145.
[27] *Ibid.*, VI, 81; cf. III, 219; I, 286.

[27] John Sterling in an essay on Carlyle for the *London and Westminster Review* (1839), says: "It is not too much to say, that to these and other labors of the same hand (*i. e.*, Carlyle's *Essays* and miscellaneous papers), is due almost all the just appreciation of Goethe now existing in England (Sterling, *Essays and Tales*, I, 294).

CHAPTER VI

The Essays on Goethe

To show how Carlyle applied his criticism to Goethe, we shall briefly analyze the two essays of 1828 and 1832.[1] The extended introduction to the first essay and the great critical manifesto at the end of it, to which we have so often referred, evidence his sense of the immense difficulty of making Goethe understood to English readers of 1828. They declare too his purpose to remove, if he can, the distorted portrait drawn by the reviewers and to substitute another painted after his own ideals and in harmony with principles that are constructive. Here is "the highest reputation over all Europe," he says, "here is a poet whose spiritual progress symbolizes not only individual but national development." The business of the critic is to see this imposing figure as it is, to account for its exalted position, to "trace its history, to discover by what steps such influence has been attained." For this reputation, the essayist declares, is deserved and its influence is beneficial, because in Goethe we discover an artist in the old sense, a seer in whom wisdom, speaking from a harmonious manhood, delivers its message with a voice of authority.

Carlyle handles his subject in his customary manner, considering first the literary character and second the mind of this character as disclosed in its works. The present essay however shows a modification of method as regards the biographical section. Carlyle clearly understood that Goethe's personal life, at all events the most important part of it, namely, the moral and spiritual struggles, was interwoven in the written works;[2] and being interested above all else in Goethe's spiritual

[1] The separate criticisms and notices of Goethe are: *Preface to William Meister's Apprenticeship* (1824), introduction to *Meister's Travels* in *German Romance* (1827), *Goethe's Helena, Goethe* (1828), *Goethe's Portrait, Death of Goethe,* introduction to a translation of *Das Märchen, Goethe's Works* (1832).

[2] *Essays,* I, 177.

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development, he omits entirely the outer biographical facts and confines his treatment to the moral history of the poet as it is set forth in three or four prose pieces.[3] First is the period of *Götz von Berlichingen* and *Werter*. When these appeared, the mind of Europe, Carlyle says, was cold and conventional in literature, sensational and materialistic in philosophy, skeptical in religion. After Voltaire had set his torch to the jungle of superstition, nothing remained but doubt and unrest. This fever of discontent found an expression in these early works of Goethe. They remain as the record of a mind not yet freed from the slavery of self. In *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* Carlyle finds the second period of Goethe's growth. Here the outer and inner worlds have been reconciled, ideals now have their firm basis in actualities, the goal of human endeavor lies straight ahead. From this book the critic turns to its sequal, *Meister's Travels,* a work which he praises, nay almost worships, for the message it carries, and from which he extracts the greater number of passages quoted in the essay.[4] These two parts of *Wilhelm Meister* together show Goethe's "change from inward imprisonment, doubt and discontent, into freedom, belief and clear activity,"[5] and therefore prove him to be the representative modern man.

The critical section is hardly one fifth as long as what precedes, and the analysis is necessarily condensed and highly generalized. But even here the method is typical, since Carlyle in his greater essays seldom regards individual pieces, but rather the author's mind as reflected in his work as a whole. Two general characteristics of Goethe are pointed out, his emblematic intellect[6] and his universality. As to special qualities Carlyle adds nothing to those described in his introduction to the *Travels,* from which he quotes a passage on Goethe's

[3] The magnitude of his subject, the limits of his space, and the fact that he had a year before furnished a short biography were also factors in the problem of structure.

[4] The tenth and eleventh chapters in the *Travels* are praised and are quoted from, on account of their thoughts on religion.

[5] *Ibid.,* I, 210.

[6] *I. e.,* "his never-failing tendency to transform into *shape,* into *life,* the opinion, the feeling that may dwell in him" (*Ibid.,* 211).

calmness and beauty of spirit, as the fruit of long culture, and his philosophic mind wherein "the world is a whole." The interpretation concludes with a reference to Voltaire, who as a destroyer, is contrasted with the builder Goethe.

Perhaps no other essay of Carlyle's so well illustrates his application of general principles to an individual case as does this first and greater appreciation of Goethe. It shows both the critic's strength and his limitations to unusual advantage, for it was written when his interest in criticism was at its height and it is concerned with the man to whom he acknowledged the heaviest spiritual obligations. He is careful to repeat several times that he does not attempt to judge the work of Goethe strictly and solely as literature, nor to apply the critical scales for measuring defects and blemishes considered by themselves, after the fashion of the older criticism.[7] According to a fundamental principle in his criticism, which says you should interpret the spiritual essence of man and book—regarding each as counterpart of the other—as their true poetry, Carlyle seeks to expound the intellectual history of Goethe, his moral progress from unbelief to belief, his interpretation of the divine idea.[8] The method, so far, is characteristic, but the spiritual indebtedness of Carlyle to Goethe, noticed above, gives to this essay, as well as to the later one, something special. Throughout there is the attitude of disciple to master.[9] The tone is reverential. Certain exaggerated judgments of *Wilhelm Meister* suggest the admiring and grateful pupil whom Goethe "had taught, whom he had helped to lead out of spiritual obstruction, into peace and light." Added to this spirit of reverence, and partly in consequence of it, there is, it must be admitted, a slight strain of didacticism here and there in the essay; an element by no means implied in Carlyle's critical principles and not much evident in his earlier criticism.[10] These deductions made, the reader will find little else to cause him to regard this essay as different from all the others in spirit and method. Carlyle consistently interprets Goethe from within, he does not censure from without. The idea, or the

[7] *Ibid.*, 176, 180, 181, 195, 198.
[8] *Ibid.*, 182, 194, 202, 211.
[9] *Ibid.*, 213, 218.
[10] *E. g.*, I, 195.

message of Goethe, lies in the fact that he is a builder and has lived a whole life in a time of halfness. This appreciation is firmly supported by the biographical, historical and comparative methods of criticism; for the life and environment of Goethe are never lost sight of, and his relation to his age, together with a comparison of his influence and Voltaire's, receives the notice due to a force like Goethe's.

The second essay is significant, not because it adds to or subtracts from previous estimates, but rather because it shows the change that has taken place in Carlyle himself between 1828 and 1832. In this period *Sartor* and *Characteristics* were written; Carlyle, weary of reviewing, tired of the Germans, wished to deliver a personal message in an independent work. This last essay on Goethe witnesses to this condition of mind. One fifth of it is given up to a rhapsody on great men in the Teufelsdröckh manner. Four pages more are occupied with praise of Goethe and Napoleon as the two heroes of their era. Above the noise of hero-worship are heard echoes of the Reform Bill of 1832 and of Benthamite utilitarianism. The prophet has invaded the domain of the critic. Critical interest has waned, for even in the body of the essay Carlyle declares that the greatest work of every man is the life he has led,[11] and that concerning Goethe's writings in general "it is needless to repeat what has elsewhere been written."[12] He therefore sketches Goethe's external history at considerable length, filling in with copious extracts from *Dichtung und Wahrheit*. When he reaches the period of *Götz* and *Werter* he regards "what we can specially call the Life" of Goethe as commencing—the inner life, that is to say, with which the essay of 1828 is so largely concerned. This life now lies before him in forty volumes, but his characteristic summaries show that Goethe has taught him nothing new. The central idea remains what it was. "In *Goethe's Works,* chronologically arranged," he says, "we see this above all things: A mind working itself into clearer and clearer freedom; gaining a more and more perfect dominion of its world."[13] The poet after

[11] *Ibid.*, IV, 147.
[12] *Ibid.*, 169, 172.
[13] *Ibid.*, 172.

passing through three stages of development—the period of *Werter,* of the *Apprenticeship,* of the *Travels*—stands forth "as the true prophet of his time," a poet whose powers are so transcendent as to prompt the critic to place him in a class with Shakespeare.

The essay of 1832 is inferior to the one of 1828. Carlyle is not less but more reverent. But his reverence is that of a prophet, not that of a critic. The didactic element is now obtruded on all sides, not merely suggested in a remark here and there. And yet the methods used and the conclusions reached do not essentially differ from those in the earlier essay. Here, as there, the message, the mind of Goethe, is the thing. This, moreover, is regarded in its representative character, its relation to society. Goethe is looked upon "chiefly as a world-changer, and benignant spiritual revolutionist," and "his Spiritual History is, as it were, the ideal emblem of all true men's in these days."[14] Though Carlyle distinctly declares that now is not the time for a "critical examination" of the "merits and characteristics" of the voluminous writings of Goethe,[15] it is difficult for the student of his criticism to believe that the time would ever have arrived when Carlyle would, or even could, examine the work of Goethe except as an expression of the poet's spiritual history. This inner life, this truth or idea, Carlyle had indeed already set forth in such a manner as to show to the world what was for him Goethe's eternal significance.

[14] *Ibid.,* 181. [15] *Ibid.,* 172.

CHAPTER VII

Carlyle and Voltaire

The study of Goethe and the conditions which helped to produce him inevitably led Carlyle back to Voltaire, that witty, versatile and audacious Frenchman whose influence in the eighteenth century was as wide as the intellectual horizon of Europe. In 1829, the date of Carlyle's essay, Voltaire and Voltairism in England were synonymous with immorality and irreligion. To the average cultivated Englishman Voltaire had long stood as a perfect exemplar of the sensuality and hypocrisy, the unbounded impiety of the age of Louis XV. As a *Quarterly* reviewer expressed it, he was at once the wonder and the scorn of mankind. This extremely hostile position toward him was far more pronounced during the last quarter of the eighteenth century than it had been at any earlier date. When Voltaire visited England in 1726 as the brilliant and persecuted young author of *Œdipe* and *La Henriade,* he was received with attention by many and with particular favor by not a few; and English life and thought left upon his restlessly inquiring intelligence a permanent influence for good. But the England of 1726 was the England of Pope and Swift, Gay and Congreve, Bolingbroke and the elder Walpole. Forty years later in the reign of George III, though there were Voltairians like Hume, Gibbon and Horace Walpole, the opinions of the King and of Johnson were representative. They thought that Voltaire was a monster, even though a clever one, as the King remarked to Fanny Burney. At the time of the French Revolution this prejudice deepened into intense antipathy, not of course to Voltaire alone but to all that was French. During the first twenty-five years of the nineteenth century there was a gradual reaction, and Voltaire was rather widely read by educated and literary people. But with the exception of some acute, though

casual, opinions from Hazlitt, no Englishman up to the time of Carlyle's essay in the *Foreign Review* had ventured to make a thorough critical study of Voltaire. Carlyle's was the first serious attempt to estimate the great Frenchman not as a monster of iniquity but as a human being. And if his interpretation does not to-day satisfy the rigid demands of more accurate if narrower scholarship, or of wider tolerance, it should have undisputed title to the position of the first among the great studies of Voltaire that have brought about a changed attitude toward him in England.

Upon superficial consideration it should seem that Voltaire was the last man in the world to interest Carlyle. In all important respects each was the intellectual antithesis of the other. In some of his phases one might be regarded as a gay and supple-minded skeptic, Europe's irreverent jester, France's typical Frenchman; the other in the main was a religious, superserious mystic, nurtured among the straitest sect of Scotch Calvinists. These differences do indeed tell in Carlyle's interpretation, but with all his prepossessions and prejudices, Carlyle was keenly curious concerning a world-influence like Voltaire's and in 1828, his critical faculties were at their best. Besides, Voltaire was not to him merely an individual, but "the paragon and epitome of a whole spiritual period," a man "whose doctrines have affected not only the belief of the thinking world; but in a high degree also, the conduct of the active and political world; entering as a distinct element into some of the most fearful civil convulsions which European history has on record."[1] In other words, Voltairism was more to Carlyle than Voltaire; he was more interested in the opinions and influence that emanated from Voltaire and spread over Europe than he was regarding the personal fortunes, the literary tastes of the author of *Zaïre* and *Candide*.

The subject is approached over the same broad principles that were laid down in the appreciation of Goethe. Carlyle urges upon his readers the need for sympathy with Voltaire, he presses Voltaire's claim to be regarded as a man and to be judged in terms of universal principles of human nature.

[1] *Essays*, II, 124, 125.

"This is a European subject, or there never was one," he says; "and must, if we would in the least comprehend it, be looked at neither from the parish belfry, nor any Peterloo platform; but, if possible, from some natural and infinitely higher point of vision."[2] The application of these principles to the subject in hand presents a problem which Carlyle states as follows: "To ascertain what was the true significance of Voltaire's history, both as respects himself and the world; what was his specific character and value as a man; what has been the character and value of his influence on society, of his appearance as an active agent in the culture of Europe: all this leads us into much deeper investigations; on the settlement of which, however, the whole business turns."[3] The answer to these broad questions, the interpretation of Voltaire that is to say, involves the use of all the methods which are a part of Carlyle's criticism, but chiefly the biographical and historical; for the critic sees his material not only in its individual, but in its large social relations.

Voltaire is appreciated first as a man, then as a writer; or first in his moral, and second in his intellectual capacity.[4] But whether as man or as writer he is studied always in relation to his age and as a part of it. Moreover he is not regarded merely on this side or that, but as a whole; and the intellectual characteristics are thought of as growing out of the moral. To Carlyle Voltaire was a living unity, as Goethe was.

The essay is one of the most regular in structure and most wide and sweeping in its generalizations that Carlyle ever wrote. The reader who knows his Voltaire and has some appreciation of Voltaire's multitudinous activities during a long life cannot but respect the thoroughness with which Carlyle seems to have gone over those "six-and-thirty quartos," extracting so much of their essence and depositing it within the pages of a single review article. The latter-day critic may repeatedly find himself in disagreement with the conclusion reached, but if he suspects that this difference is due to want of knowledge on the part of Carlyle he is likely to discover

[2] *Ibid.*, II, 128.
[3] *Ibid.*, 129.
[4] *Ibid.*, 131, 161.

somewhere in the essay a phrase or a sentence to dissipate his doubts. The characteristics of Voltaire the man are presented in an orderly analysis. His merits—adroitness and rectitude—hardly balance his defects or limitations—want of earnestness and inborn shallowness—for this Corypheus of deism was by birth a mocker. The age in which he lived fostered the lighter sides of his nature. In an epoch of disruption and decay, when society was hopelessly split into fragments, Voltaire became, not a philosopher and reconciler, but a partisan whose ruling passion was ambition and whose perpetual appeal was to his contemporaries. Public opinion was his deity, not eternal truth. "We see in him," says Carlyle, "simply a Man of the World, such as Paris and the eighteenth century produced and approved of: a polite, attractive, most cultivated, but essentially self-interested man; not without highly amiable qualities; indeed with a general disposition which we could have accepted in a mere Man of the World, but must find very defective, sometimes altogether out of place, in a Poet and Philosopher."[5] Voltaire therefore "is no great Man, but only a great Persifleur," a phrase which may be taken as Carlyle's final formula for Voltaire on the moral side. The critic adds that the great Frenchman played his part with life-long consistency of aim, and deserves the high praise of being in "unity with himself."[6]

In the interpretation thus far Carlyle expressly declares that he is trying Voltaire by too high a standard[7] but that he has no other. He cannot avoid measuring Voltaire as he measures Goethe and Scott and Johnson, in terms of his own philosophy of life. Voltaire is not heroic and he is therefore not truly great. To him the Divine Idea was invisible, his soul did not dilate with the thought of the "Mighty All, in its beauty, and infinite mysterious grandeur." Voltaire's life therefore is negative in its results, a life in which the first question always was "not what is true, but what is false, not what is to be loved, but what is to be derided."[8] This estimate carries with it two opinions which Carlyle is careful to state: first, that

[5] *Essays*, II, 144.
[6] *Ibid.*, 153.
[7] *Ibid.*, 145.
[8] *Ibid.*, 135; cf. 135–139.

ridicule is a small and somewhat contemptible weapon;[9] and second, that Voltaire was not himself a serious man. The transcendentalist cannot highly rate the persifleur or much value his instrument of power. With all his shrewdness, his incomparable cleverness, Voltaire is a destroyer who applies a torch to burn, he is not a constructive force like Goethe who wields a hammer to build.

Though these judgments, delivered from the high levels of Kantian philosophy and clothed in phrases of power and picturesqueness, are Carlylean through and through, and though they set forth an undeniable truth, namely, that Voltaire was neither a seer nor a lover of seers, they also make clear how all but impossible it is for a critic, living in one sphere of thought, to pass just sentence upon a writer who lives in an entirely different sphere. While Voltaire was not a Cervantes, nor a Molière, ridicule, in his hands, became what it had become in theirs, one of the most potent forces known to man against extravagance and corruption; and in this sense a positive influence for good. In an age of levity and mockery, in a country ruled by the Duke of Orleans and Louis XV, when the sole restraint upon conduct was decorum and when superstition and sacerdotal power were carried to fantastic and degrading extremes, ridicule was perhaps the only agent that would work reform. At all events, it is difficult to believe that the French society of the old régime would have responded to the philosophy of Kant or to the poetry of Goethe as it responded to the arrowy wit of Voltaire. Ridicule, in such an age and so used, is an ally, not an enemy of truth. It is easy to show moreover that Voltaire was serious, sometimes fiercely serious, in his use of ridicule. Behind his laughing face and his flashing eyes, there lived an intellect more sober and purposeful than a man like Carlyle is ever likely to believe. While neither above, nor pretending to be above, his age in many matters, Voltaire waged a life-long warfare for the enthronement of commonsense and practical wisdom in every realm of human interest. In an age more priest-ridden than most, he was an implacable, if not sometimes an heroic, foe to superstition and bigotry in

[9] *Ibid.*, 134.

religion. He was serious in countless activities, as an introducer and popularizer of Newtonian science, as a disciple of Locke, as a defender of the honored but obsolescent traditions of French tragedy, and as a champion of absolute monarchy freed from the rule of the Church. Condorcet says that Voltaire was serious even in his poem, *La Pucelle,* for in this piece so full of disgusting details, he was able to assail hypocrisy and ecclesiasticism in high places. How much of this seriousness was due to selfish ambition, how much to a love of humanity, it is not easy to say. Most readers who have reviewed the facts will probably be ready to say of many of Voltaire's activities what Carlyle says of some, that, if love of reputation inspired them, then "love of *such* reputation is itself the effect of a social, humane disposition."[10]

From Voltaire the man viewed in respect to his conduct, Carlyle derives Voltaire the writer, both as man of letters and as religious polemic, viewed in respect to his intellect. The critic finds before him a complete illustration of the biographical method. "If, through all this many-colored versatility, we try to decipher the essential, distinctive features of Voltaire's intellect, it seems to us that we find there a counterpart to our theory of his moral character; as, indeed, if that theory was accurate, we must do: for the thinking and the moral nature, distinguished by the necessities of speech, have no such distinction in themselves; but, rightly examined, exhibit in every case the strictest sympathy and correspondence, are, indeed, but different phases of the same indissoluble unity,—a living mind. In life, Voltaire was found to be without good claim to the title of philosopher; and now, in literature, and for similar reasons, we find in him the same deficiencies."[11] The interpretation follows the familiar path and comes to the same end. Voltaire is not a poet because he lacks genius, the deep feeling and the clear vision, because a tragedy or a poem with him is not a manifestation of everlasting Reason. He has method, but not "poetic method"; he has wit, but no humor; he has order, but no beauty. Neither in prose, nor in verse, in tale, epic, pasquinade, or history, does he excite the soul to a sense of spirit-

[10] *Essays,* II, 132. [11] *Essays,* II, 162.

ual realities. Voltaire makes no appeal to man's highest faculty, his reason. Whatever claims he has to distinction must be defended upon other grounds, upon the ground of understanding, the second term which Carlyle takes over from Kantian philosophy. In the realm of the understanding, Voltaire is preeminent; his works have the superficial, practical, logical, unimaginative character which gives to them the highest value in the world of business relations. They exhibit expertness, superficial extent, humanity; their consummate order declare Voltaire to be the "most intelligible of writers." If he is not a genius, he is at least an unrivalled talent; if there is in him no gleam of the divine idea, he is able to display his intelligence in a thousand protean forms.[12]

In this interpretation of Voltaire as a writer Carlyle has given us eight or ten pages of brilliantly generalized criticism, perhaps unequalled elsewhere in his writings, unless it be in the essay on Burns. Nowhere else in the same space, certainly, has he thrown out more or better summaries and suggestions as to literary values. And to the Anglo Saxon mind at least, most of his criticism seems fundamentally sound.[13] Voltaire's writings open no vista to realms of the spirit, drop no plummet into the abysses of the human heart. With some of the world's truest interpreters of the soul, Plato, Dante, Shakespeare, Pascal, he had little or no sympathy. Jesus, Peter and Paul were names which he could not dissociate from ecclesiastical wars and from superstition through all the centuries. Had Carlyle's master, Goethe, been Voltaire's contemporary, Voltaire would not have understood his message and would have ridiculed much of the form in which it was conveyed. *Faust* must have been to him no voice from the skies, but the unintelligible utterance of a rude foreigner. When thought left the daylight world of practical wisdom, when it strayed from the path of good sense and good taste, as these were understood in the France of the eighteenth century, Voltaire laughed at it as the vagary of a superstitious or an uncultivated mind. His con-

[12] *Ibid.*, 162–170.

[13] Cf. Brunetière, *Études Critiques*, I, 248–253; *Faguet, Dix-Huitième Siècle*, 247.

temporary Rousseau was to him only a celebrated ignoramus who used his intellect to prove men beasts. It is not strange that Carlyle could find no poetry in Voltaire; there was none to seek, at least of the kind he looked for. Interpretative and philosophical criticism must therefore come to negative conclusions.

But Voltaire is perhaps the most conspicuous example of a class of writers who suffer from a too exclusive application of this method—men of letters who live by their pen and who exert a prodigious influence upon their immediate contemporaries. Carlyle's criticism leaves Voltaire the man of letters too much in the background. The literary history of France in the eighteenth century without Voltaire, would be *Hamlet* with Hamlet left out. Upon every field of thought he left his impress. In history he was a progressive force; in the drama a conservative one. He could write a story or a poem that would stir the salons of France to laughter. His letters, expressed in phrases of matchless limpidity and grace, carried messages of power to all parts of Europe and brought down ridicule upon imposters and quacks, or won justice for those who had suffered from the want of it. Voltaire's pen was literally mightier than the sword of Louis the Well-Beloved. Of this Voltaire, Carlyle's interpretation gives but an indistinct picture and yet perhaps the one portrait that the world would care to preserve, fresh and clear, is that which presents Voltaire as the incarnated Spirit of French letters in the Eighteenth Century.

It is as a religious polemic rather than as a man of letters that Voltaire figures most prominently before the world, in the opinion of Carlyle. In other words Voltairism, or warfare upon revealed religion, is greater than Voltaire. Here too we find intellectual unity. "We may say in general," says Carlyle, "that his style of controversy is of a piece with himself; not a higher, and scarcely a lower style than might have been expected from him."[14] Voltaire is ingenious and adroit, not noble and comprehensive. In his battle with unreason he fights with borrowed weapons; he marches under the

[14] *Essays*, II, 171.

flag of English thinkers and the French Bayle. More than this, his knowledge is shallow, since it turns wholly upon the inspiration of the Scriptures and regards Christianity as a book-made religion; whereas religious truth is revealed to man not through books, but by intuition, is born not to the understanding, but to the reason. Voltaire's faults, says Carlyle, are also the chief faults of his time and country. "It was an age without nobleness, without high virtue or high manifestation of talent; an age of shallow clearness, of polish, self-conceit, skepticism and all forms of *Persiflage*." It is little surprising, he adds, that Voltaire in such an age "should have partaken largely of all its qualities."[15] His task in this epoch was not one of affirmation, but of denial. Voltairism then, according to Carlyle's formula, is negation.[16]

In this final appreciation it will be seen that Carlyle applies once more the same high standards of criticism: true religion, like true literature or true life, is not a creation of the understanding, but of the reason. And once more it may be said that Carlyle's position, from the point of view of the unchanging realities of the inner life, is unassailable. Voltaire was not an original thinker, but a popularizer of other men's thinking. His work, interpreted from so exalted a position, is irreverent in spirit and negative in results. The man who for twenty years and more, in the *Philosophical Dictionary* and in hundreds of letters, relentlessly fought established religion, or the *Infamous* as he called it, is little likely to yield to later generations much of the real spirit of Christianity, or of religious reverence, in Carlyle's meaning of the word. But again Carlyle's criticism needs to be supplemented with a criticism that takes fuller account than does his, of the positive results of Voltaire's work as regarded from the point of view of Voltaire's own age and country. For while the critic is swift to condemn the era of Louis XV and frankly recognizes its life as something to be torn down and swept away, he cannot heartily praise Voltaire and Voltairism for their large part in the labor of destruction. He does not make sufficiently clear what Christianity stood for in the old régime; how for the most part

[15] *Ibid.*, 179. [16] *Ibid.*, 171–179.

it was identical with a corrupt and superstitious sacerdotalism, how it compromised and coexisted with all forms of vice, fettered the press, fought enlightenment and strove to hold the people of France down to an ever debasing ignorance. Nor is Carlyle just in declaring that the age of Voltaire was not one of creation and discovery, and that the French philosophers came to criticise and quarrel and rend to pieces, but not to invent and produce.[17] In natural, economic and political science the period was constructive in many directions and did much to build the foundations for the religious and political liberty of a later age. But it is not our purpose to supply the omissions in Carlyle's interpretation. We wish rather to point out here, as we have earlier in connection with other divisions of the essay, that the ideals of criticism by which he measures the polemical work of Voltaire, work so largely contemporary and therefore transient in character, are far too high, if applied exclusively; since in the application of such standards the immense influence for good of Voltaire upon his own day and generation is not appreciated at its full worth. Had Carlyle praised for its positive result the death-stab which, as he so finely says, Voltaire gave to modern superstition, his interpretation of this third phase would scarcely need to be qualified.[18]

[17] *Ibid.*, 178–179.

[18] The essay on Voltaire, as has been pointed out, shows Carlyle's failure to "perceive that the positive achievements of Voltaire could not have been won in any age by a man not truly great in a positive sense." This, of course, is to measure Voltaire by other standards than Carlyle's.

CHAPTER VIII

The English Essays

Carlyle wrote but three essays on English subjects, *Burns, Boswell's Life of Johnson* and *Sir Walter Scott.* He proposed to write others, notably one on Byron and another on "Fashionable Novels," but they never appeared, chiefly because Napier, the successor to Jeffrey as editor of the *Edinburgh Review,* to whom they were offered, was warned that Carlyle was a man to be feared as an intense radical and a hysterical worshipper of German divinities. The three essays, which therefore constitute his deliberate appreciation of English authors, cover a decade of time and roughly mark the end of three critical periods in Carlyle's literary fortunes. The essay on Burns was the first work executed at Craigenputtock, whither in 1828 he had moved from Edinburgh in order to toil and think and be beyond the reach of interruptions. His critical interest was now at its height, and he had entered the field of letters far enough to be recognized as a new force. But as we have said so often, reviewing in no long time gave way to prophesying; *Sartor* succeeded *Signs of the Times,* and *Characteristics* followed *Sartor.* Carlyle became restless to deliver his personal message to the world. His letters during this period show that he was considering great moral subjects,—Luther and the German reformation, John Knox and the Scottish reformation. Finally in 1831 he went up to London to try his fortunes with *Sartor,* but the publishers would not print it. Carlyle remained in the metropolis through the winter, a lonely crabbed mystic, sneering and sneered at, a man whose literary and material fortunes still hung in the balance. In the spring before returning to Craigenputtock, at the request of James Fraser, the publisher, he wrote a review of Boswell's *Life of Johnson.* This great essay, like the second one on Goethe written a few months later, may in one sense be regarded as the

lyrical cry of a lonely prophet who felt that he must preach heroism to an unheroic, distracted age. After this essay was written there followed another period of struggle, uncertainty and ill-fortune. Carlyle became absorbed in a study of the French Revolution and in 1834 he moved to London where he could get books to carry on his work. Amidst the harrowing labor of these years the voice of the critic became silent. But in 1837 when the *History* was completed, this voice was heard once more, not indeed passionate and melodious, as it had been a decade ago, but still strong and commanding, fit to win attention even from those who denied its authority. The essay on Sir Walter Scott, published in 1838, was the last of the critical essays, and with it the career of Carlyle the critic may be said to have come to a close.

(*a*) *Burns*

Of all the essays from Carlyle's pen that on Burns is the best known and most admired. As Dr. Garnett so well said, it is the "very voice of Scotland." In Burns Carlyle found a subject that fired his heart, a native poet whose songs and whose tragical life alike stirred him to passionate sympathy. To his eyes the Ayrshire poet appeared not as a vulgar wonder to be stared at from the heights of literary Edinburgh, but as Scotland's most original genius and as one of the song-makers of the world. The affinities between Burns and Carlyle were numerous and special. Both were sons of Scottish peasants, both were poor, proud, independent, gifted and ambitious. Like Carlyle, Burns was born to wage war with a hostile environment, unlike him he was destined to be defeated because his will was not as Carlyle's, the will of a Titan. His tragical fate, together with his origin and environment, moved the critic to love and pity. Instead of the turbid stream of declamation that was sometimes poured into the later essays, there flows through this interpretation of Burns a tenderness almost feminine and a spirit of devotion almost sentimental. Even down to his closing years Carlyle would recite or hum over to himself the verses of Burns with the deep delight born of real community of spirit.

He makes no apology for giving up two-thirds of his essay to the life of Burns. "It is not chiefly as a poet," says Carlyle, "but as a man, that he interests us and affects us."[1] Here was a tragical career peculiarly alluring to the moralist, here was a gifted genius gone to ruin because he failed to reconcile the ideal with the actual, failed, that is, to put into practice the great Goethean doctrine of renunciation. Into his account of Burns's waverings between inner and outer conditions Carlyle has put the sum-total of his own ethical philosophy. He measures the "inward springs and relations" of Burns's character in terms of the high ideals he applies to all other men. Burns, he says, was born a true poet and therefore should have been a prophet and teacher to his age.[2] He should have fitted himself by rigorous discipline, by self-denying toil, to deliver his message to his generation. But a man born to be a *vates* or seer must live a whole life, he cannot be anything by halves. The grand error in Burns's life was "the want of unity in his purposes, of consistency in his aims." It was "a hapless attempt to mingle in friendly union the common spirit of the world with the spirit of poetry, which is of a far different and altogether irreconcilable nature. Burns was nothing wholly."[3]

In discussing the want of harmony between the clay soil of Mossgiel and the soul of Burns, Carlyle takes large account of circumstances, the poet's material condition and the influences of the period. He recognizes the pressure of the external fact in the form of poverty, lack of education, early temptations to depart from the right path. He thinks too that Burns's religious quarrels were a "circumstance of fatal import."[4] But of all the outer forces that helped to wreck the poet's life, Carlyle regards the visits to Edinburgh as strongest. These did him great and lasting injury and maddened his heart "still more with the fever of worldly ambition." Had the patrons of genius left Burns to himself "the wounds of the heart would have been healed, vulgar ambition would have died away." "These men, as we believe, were proximately the means of

[1] *Essays*, II, 6; cf. 29.
[2] *Ibid.*, 46.
[3] *Ibid.*, 47.
[4] *Ibid.*, 33.

his ruin."[5] But it would have been contrary to Carlyle's philosophy of life to place the final blame elsewhere than upon Burns himself. "His was no bankruptcy of the purse," says the moralist, "but of the soul."[6] It lay in the power of the poet to have lived true to his higher self, to have listened to the voice of the poetic spirit within him, to have made all else save himself and his art a small matter.[7] For the reason that Burns did not live upon this high level, did not bend his soul to the work of revealing the divine idea, Carlyle pronounces his life a fragment.

The general truth of this concluding judgment may pass unchallenged. Burns's life was partial and incomplete. It is idle too to question Carlyle's opinion that the cause of failure lay ultimately with the poet himself. Those whose philosophy of life differs from that of Carlyle may place the blame upon a cruel environment, but, as our entire study has shown, his opinion follows necessarily from the ideals which he held. We may, however, point out that he does not treat the great critical period in Burns's life, the visits to Edinburgh, with strict justice. Cynicism and prejudice seem to have deflected his judgment. It was inevitable that Carlyle should seize upon this picturesque and dramatic episode and make much of it. It was equally inevitable, perhaps, with his hatred of "gigmanity," that he should add to his final opinion a special condemnation of the upper classes. We may admit at once that the poet's two visits to Edinburgh unsettled him for a time. He saw, as he had not seen before, the pitiless divisions between the upper and lower strata of society, and he learned for the first time that genius without habitual refinement is not a sure guarantee of social equality. But the subsequent tenor of Burns's life shows very plainly that his Edinburgh visits did not madden him with the fever of worldly ambition. The higher classes moreover did help him to answer the question what next to do. More than all else we must not overlook, as Carlyle appears to have done, the fact that Burns's ostracism from society at Edinburgh and later at Dumfries really came as the result of his

[5] *Ibid.*, 37–40.
[6] *Ibid.*, 39.
[7] *Ibid.*, 46, 49, 51.

own evil courses. The convivial poet, alternating between the tables of the high and the taverns of the low, and fast descending to the lowest, could not expect to retain the favor and social patronage of refined people. Such important phases of the ethical question at all events Carlyle does not seem to have treated quite candidly, or rather he is prone to give to the Edinburgh visits an active part in the tragedy of Burns's life, when at most it was seductively passive.

As with the life, so with the writings of Burns. His moral nature was at war with itself and therefore his work remains without the unity of a great idea—remains "a poor mutilated fraction of what was in him; brief, broken glimpses of a genius that could never show itself complete."[8] "We can look on but few of these pieces," says Carlyle, speaking of the poetry of Burns, "as, in strict critical language, deserving the name of Poems: they are rhymed eloquence, rhymed pathos, rhymed sense; yet seldom essentially melodious, aerial, poetical."[9] Burns therefore is "not perhaps absolutely a great poet"; he "never rose, except by natural effort and for short intervals into the region of great ideas."[10] Since the poet attained no mastery in his art, the critic thinks it would be "at once unprofitable and unfair" to try him, his imperfect fragments, by the "strict rules of Art."[11] In these opinions, however, the final judgment is implicit. Burns is not a great poet because he has no idea to reveal, because he speaks no word of authentic truth. But if not absolutely great, he is "a poet of Nature's own making,"[12] and "one of the most considerable British men of the eighteenth century."[13] His work has an enduring quality, a rare excellence that merits high appreciation. The source of its sustained vitality, Carlyle finds to be sincerity, graphic phrasal power, vigor and fineness of mind, as shown in the poet's love, indignation and humor. Nowhere else in the considerable mass of Burns criticism is there an interpretation so sympathetic, so illuminated with flashes of inspired comment as this which Carlyle has given us in a few short

[8] *Ibid.*, 8.
[9] *Ibid.*, 23.
[10] *Ibid.*, 13, 18.
[11] *Ibid.*, 5, 8.
[12] *Ibid.*, 13.
[13] *Ibid.*, 4.

pages. The treatment is critical in the best sense. Carlyle's insight, knowledge and sympathy are nowhere used to better results, and he evidences an appreciation of the phrasal beauty and emotional value of poetry all too rare in his critical essays.

Perhaps the strongest proofs of his original capacity for criticism are the few paragraphs on *Tam O'Shanter, The Jolly Beggars* and the songs of Burns. Here criticism shows itself to be truly a creative art, as Carlyle said it was. *Tam O'Shanter,* he says, is "not so much a poem, as a piece of sparkling rhetoric." Its parts, its naturalism and supernaturalism, are not properly fused; it is not strictly comic, but farcical; it is not organically, but artificially, alive. Carlyle, we observe, is here applying his test of unity or central truth. with negative results; and to him therefore Burns's *Tam O'Shanter* lacks universal, symbolic significance; is not poetry but rhymed farce.[14] He measures *The Jolly Beggars* by the same standard. This poem rises "into the domain of Art," because it "seems thoroughly compacted; melted together, refined," because its characters are at once "Scottish, yet ideal," because it expresses a "universal sympathy with man." It has, in other words, inner and outer correspondence, a universal appeal, and is a self-supporting whole, "the highest merit in a poem." In these few passages we have a theory of art of Aristotelian breadth applied to concrete material with suggestive results.[15] The songs are considered "by far the best that Britain has yet produced." Carlyle ranks Burns as "the first of all of our Songwriters," and thinks that Burns's chief influence as an author will ultimately rest upon his songs. The second paragraph in this section is the very poetry of criticism, worthy to be classed with the appreciations of Charles Lamb at their best. Had Carlyle chosen to develop the vein that shows itself here, it

[14] Considering the time of its deliverance, this criticism shows Carlyle's independence of judgment perhaps better than any other that we can point to. All the critics before him, Jeffrey, Scott, Lockhart, Hazlitt, Byron, Wordsworth, regarded *Tam* as Burns's masterpiece. So did Burns. (Wallace, *Life,* III, 254.)

[15] *The Jolly Beggars* was not much noticed by the early critics. It was not indeed published in complete form till 1802. Scott praises it highly. Matthew Arnold with Carlyle ranks it higher than *Tam O'Shanter.*

should seem that he might have become one of England's two or three great critics.[16]

It is when we consider the treatment of the poet's relation to the literature of his own day that we must deduct something from our praise of Carlyle as a critic, especially in his use of the historical method. He touches lightly, though masterfully, upon the literary revival in Scotland and upon Burns's share in it. "In this brilliant resuscitation of our 'fervid genius,'" he says, "there was nothing Scottish, nothing indigenous." Culture was exclusively French and attenuated. But after Burns's day a spirit of nationalism sprang up, and literature became native, domestic, democratic. In this change Scott's influence is acknowledged, but the influence of Burns also, says Carlyle, "may have been considerable," for "his example, in the fearless adoption of domestic subjects, could not but operate from afar." Historical criticism in so far is sound. But Carlyle makes a mistake in regarding the work of Burns as the beginning of a new movement rather than as the culmination of an old. His casual and depreciating notices of Ramsay and Ferguson, the predecessors of Burns, and his apologetic reference to the Scottish dialect, together with various remarks on Burns's lack of proper education, indicate that he did not correctly appreciate the relation of the poet to the vernacular school of poetry. Had Burns written exclusively in English, following the models and literary influences of that day, he would now belong to the school of Shenstone, Thomson and Pope; for his English poetry is admitted on nearly all sides to be his weakest—stiff, imitative, Augustan. The true way is to interpret the poetry of Burns as the flowering of a spirit transmitted through Ferguson and

[16] In relating this bit of criticism of the songs to Carlyle's general theories, we should not forget that to him a song belongs after all to the outlying province of poetry, is "a brief simple species of composition" (*Ibid.*, 23–26). "Had Carlyle been able to take the modern point of view of the student of *genres* and if he had considered the power of the lyric in all ages to go, as scarcely any other form of art does, straight to the heart of man, and then had noted that Burns had gone to the heart of Scotland and indeed of the world, he might have had doubts with regard to his denial of Burns's greatness as a poet" (comment made upon my manuscript).

Ramsay from the older Scottish Makers. Burns was greatly indebted to this vernacular literature, for language, meters, subjects, even for ideas, phrases and entire verses. What now seems fulsome praise of Ramsay and Ferguson in the preface to the Kilmarnock Edition of his poems, was a sincere, if grandiloquent, tribute to the lesser poets who kindled his own purer flame.[17] The truth is, Carlyle gives little hint of Burns the craftsman, a subject that would compel consideration of the poet's predecessors in vernacular song, of his ways of handling that older literature, and of his magical power of creating an immortal song from some rude, popular jingle. Burns was an uneven and often a slovenly craftsman, but at his best he was a deliberate and consummate artist, sifting his material with anxious care and fashioning it to suit his high technical demands. Carlyle's essay, therefore, while great as an interpretation of the life of the poet and of the substance of his poetry, must be supplemented by the work[18] of later scholars and critics, if Burns is to receive his full measure of justice.

(*b*) *Boswell and Johnson*

In the second English essay, *Boswell's Life of Johnson*, Carlyle is both critic and prophet. The changed style and thought proclaim the prophet. Peculiarities of language which found full expression for the first time in *Sartor* appear in this essay in considerable profusion. Hero-worship, the prophet's special message, is thrust forward in two or three expressions and in connection with the main subject itself. Johnson and his biographer, Boswell, are indeed cogent illustrations of a doctrine increasing in favor with Carlyle; for in them he found both hero and hero-worshipper, each by a kind of divine attraction, drawn to the other for the edification of succeeding generations. From this point of view, moreover, it is difficult to avoid regarding the entire essay as a tract for the times. In 1832 reform agitation was at its height. The conditions of

[17] Though Carlyle speaks in an apologizing tone of the Scotch dialect, all the songs and poems that he cites, except two, are from the Scotch.

[18] *E. g.*, the *Centenary Edition* of Burns by Henley and Henderson.

English life, political and social, were alarming to many minds. The tide of innovation was strong and men feared that the old landmarks were in danger of being swept away. Carlyle, then in London, watched the current of affairs with eager interest, in fact with apprehension; for reform never meant to him, what it did to the utilitarians, a change in external conditions merely. Unless reform reached the individual and lifted him to a better life, Carlyle distrusted and condemned it, he even feared it. The only way the individual can be bettered, he said, is by contact with another greater individual; soul is kindled only by soul. His remedy for the distracted times of 1832, therefore, was the gospel of hero-worship.

But the prophet does not quite usurp the place of the critic. No other essay displays deeper discernment or more thorough knowledge of subject than this, and it is only below the first *Goethe* and the *Burns* in sympathy. In epithet and phrase, from the first page to the last, there are flashes of keenest insight. Illuminating suggestions on literature and life are strewn lavishly along the way. We find Carlyle, moreover, measuring Boswell and Johnson, the men and their work, by precisely the same standards which he applied in earlier essays to Richter and to Goethe. The critical method remains unchanged, because the principles upon which it was established are in 1832 what they were in 1828.

A telling proof of the sustained vitality of Carlyle's critical powers is his treatment of Boswell. To say aught in 1832 in defense of Johnson's biographer was to fly in the face of all literary opinion. From 1768 when Gray, commenting on Boswell's first literary venture, the book on Corsica, said that "any fool may write a most valuable book if he will only tell what he heard and saw with veracity,"[19] down to 1831 when Macaulay in the *Edinburgh Review* launched his notorious paradox that Boswell would never have been a great writer if he had not been a great fool, Boswell had been the object of unmeasured ridicule. His only title to public recognition seems to have been his many-sided folly. Carlyle clearly saw the position which Boswell occupied before the British public, but he re-

[19] Gray, *Works*, III, 310.

fused to believe that a great biography had been written by a fool, or that good work could be done by reason of weaknesses or vices. His entire theory of life and of literature was against such a false paradox. He did not shut his eyes to Boswell's follies and foibles, he saw them with a keener vision than did Macaulay, and his portrait of the exterior Bozzy ranks as a masterpiece in a gallery of great paintings. But to laugh at a man's fantastic freaks and to catalogue them is not the same as to interpret the man. Macaulay's Boswell was not for Carlyle the biographer of Johnson. In the place of a false paradox he supplied a true one. Here he said is a man who "has provided us a greater *pleasure* than any other individual . . . ; perhaps has done us a great *service* and can be especially attributed to more than two or three; . . . yet no written or spoken eulogy of James Boswell anywhere exists." This situation existed because critics had seen the visible vices of Boswell, but had no insight into his hidden virtues. Boswell is correctly understood, says Carlyle, only when we think of him as a disciple, a hero-worshipper. He had in him a "love of excellence" invisible to the general eye. In an unspiritual eighteenth century when "Reverence for Wisdom" had well-nigh vanished from the earth, Boswell was raised up to be "a real martyr to this high everlasting truth" that "Hero-worship lives perennially in the human bosom." True to his biographical method, Carlyle finds in this interpretation a key to the greatness of Boswell's work. "Boswell wrote a good Book because he had a heart and an eye to discern Wisdom, and an utterance to render it forth; because of his free insight, his lively talent, above all, of his Love and childlike Openmindedness. None but a *reverent* man could have found his way from Boswell's environment to Johnson's." The critic mentions insight and talent as a part of the biographer's equipment, but he lays stress upon certain *unconscious* powers, like reverence and love, as the greater part. Carlyle indeed finds in Boswell a capital illustration of his theory of art as an unconscious process. "We do the man's intellectual endowment great wrong," he says, "if we measure it by its mere logical outcome; though here too, there is not wanting a light in-

genuity, a figurativeness and fanciful sport, with glimpses of insight far deeper than the common. But Boswell's grand intellectual talent was, as such ever is, an *unconscious* one." He is, therefore, "one of Nature's own Artists," and his book is great because of its "import of *Reality*," because it is "wholly *credible*." Upon these terms Carlyle's praise of the *Life* becomes poetical, one of the sunny spots of interpretation that proves the illuminating presence of the critic. His final judgment is expressed in a sentence: "In worth as a Book we have rated it beyond any other product of the eighteenth century: all Johnson's Writings stand on a quite inferior level to it."[20]

This interpretation of Boswell is one of the highest services that the criticism of Carlyle has done for English literature. Because of it, England's greatest biographer has been lifted from a place of ridicule and contempt to one in which his real greatness is recognized. Since 1832, critical opinion has not only regarded the *Life of Johnson* as the first of biographies, but it has more and more come to understand that Boswell himself is one of England's truest literary artists who knew perfectly well the richness of his material and who knew how to shape it in obedience to the aim of a supremely self-conscious purpose. But if Carlyle's portrait, brilliant as it is, had remained untouched by later criticism, we should to-day fail to understand the real Boswell. The fact is, Carlyle attempts to strain his theory of Hero-Worship farther than it will go. When he says, for example, that it was reverence for wisdom which drew Boswell to Johnson, he has to place both Boswell and Johnson in a somewhat false position in order to support his claim. He seems to forget that when Tom Davies introduced them in 1763 Johnson was not so much "a poor rusty coated scholar," as the foremost literary figure in England. All of Johnson's important work, except the *Shakespeare* and the *Lives,* was done; he had received a pension the previous year for literary merit alone, and he was to establish the famous "Club" a year later. With all his peculiarities, Johnson was a man to know. Now Boswell,

[20] *Essays,* IV, 73–83.

beyond most men of his time or of any other, had "a rage for literature," as Hume called it; or, to use the phrase of Horace Walpole, he had "a rage of knowing anybody that was ever talked of." He deliberately sought out literary celebrities. He visited Voltaire at Ferney, Rousseau at Mortier, and in London he was never vainer than when dining with Reynolds, Garrick, Goldsmith, Beauclerk or Hume. To be with the great Cham himself, greatest of them all, was Boswell's highest felicity; then it was that the satellite shone most brightly. So far from having all to lose in seeking out Johnson, as Carlyle implies, Boswell had everything to gain. Nor does Carlyle's explanation of Boswell's art tell the whole truth. Hero-worship and Carlyle's general theory of art, as, in the deepest sense, an unconscious process, led him to keep out of sight the skilled and untiring craftsmanship that went to the making of the *Life*. Of course, in the deepest sense the art of Boswell, like that of any other craftsman, was unconscious; for he could not have explained, nor can we explain, why the gift of biography came to him and not, let us say, to Hawkins. Love and reverence for Johnson were also an indispensable part of Boswell's equipment. But unless he had cultivated these gifts, as we know he did, with the greatest patience and in obedience to the most deliberately determined ideals, he would not have produced a masterpiece which the reading world has never ceased to praise. The *Life* of itself proclaims the craftsmanship of Boswell in every chapter. But we know from numerous external sources how he labored for seven years, collecting materials, sifting, selecting, quizzing this person and that, ceaselessly searching for the least bit of information that would add to the completeness and lifelikeness of his portrait. If we think of these efforts, we may find it difficult to believe that Boswell's love and reverence, unsupported by a hundred follies and foibles and all manner of disgusting assiduities, would ever have been equal to the great and prolonged task which he set himself to do. The true interpretation of Boswell is best reached, perhaps, by a compromise between Macauley and Carlyle. It was by reason of his follies as well as his virtues—if one keeps to these terms—that Boswell realized his artistic

ideals. He was neither the unqualified fool of Macaulay's portrait, nor the martyr-hero of Carlyle's; he was something of both, it is true, but he was also a craftsman of the first rank, working by conscious processes, toward self-appointed ends.

But whatever be the true interpretation of the processes by which Boswell achieved his art, there can be no two opinions of its accomplishment. For Carlyle at any rate the case was clear; he found Boswell's work good because it revealed to him a personality which aroused his deepest interest and sympathy. We have already implied in the previous section of this chapter that the unique and profound relationship between Carlyle and Burns was spiritual; and now at the risk of confusing language we wish to point out that the remarkable sympathy between Carlyle and Johnson was largely intellectual. Affinity with Burns moreover was partly a matter of pity; it was the feeling of the strong man toward the weak. Affinity with Johnson was wholly due to the liking of one strong man for another. The mind of Carlyle indeed touches that of Johnson at so many points that at times it is hard to avoid fancying that a great spirit of the eighteenth century became reincarnated in the nineteenth. Johnson, like Carlyle, was a stoic, a hater of cant and sham, a man who renounced happiness as his rule of life. Both were passionately interested in human nature, delighting in biography and believing in the power of a really great man to turn his abilities to any account. In political principles as in ethical, the two men were singularly alike. To Johnson the doctrine of political equality was mere moonshine. He despised the teachings of Rousseau and he regarded agitators of the Wilkes type with contempt. He cherished a superior disregard of the people and (to use the words of Mrs. Piozzi) he expressed "a zeal for insubordination warm even to bigotry." While these political opinions would apply more obviously to the Carlyle of 1850 than to the Carlyle of 1832, they are in reality true of him at any period of his manhood, for he was ever as full of "intuitive aversions" as was Johnson. We might extend the parallel into the less tangible realm of temperament, for each life was over-

shadowed with melancholy or lighted at intervals with flashes of saturnine and ironic humor, and in each there dwelt a religious seriousness toward every human interest. Both Johnson and Carlyle were "characters" in their time, bold, independent, dominating, original; and both will live for future generations as men rather than as writers. In all or in nearly all of Carlyle's writing there is the "deep lyric tone" which he confesses to find in Johnson the man. It is because of this manifold and intimate sympathy that Carlyle, after Boswell, is the most inspired interpreter of Johnson. His essay, though not so well balanced as some earlier ones, deserves the praise of Edward Fitzgerald, who thought that it judged Johnson "for good and all."

The interpretation of Johnson rests upon essentially the same ideals of biography as those set forth in the essay on Burns. It is not the outer but the inner Johnson that is presented; not the eccentric, deformed giant of Macaulay's pages, but the "best intellect in England," a man belonging to the "keener order of intellects" such as Hume and Voltaire, a man "not ranking among the highest, or even the high, yet distinctly admitted into that sacred band." That is to say, Johnson is a priest and prophet whose life Carlyle frankly holds up as an answer to the question how to live, as the text to a sermon on hero-worship. The heroic aspects of Johnson's life are therefore brought forward and exhibited in the most favorable light, while the essentially literary sides are left somewhat obscured. Carlyle sings a kind of pæan over the early struggles of Johnson, and from the facts concerning Johnson's first days in London he selects material for some of his strongest paragraphs.

As Carlyle saw it, the life problem of Johnson was two-fold, how to live and how to live by speaking only the truth. The problem was made doubly difficult, because the age was transitional in literature, in politics, in religion; and because Johnson himself possessed a contradictory temperament. "It is not the least curious of the incoherences which Johnson had to reconcile," says Carlyle "that though by nature contemptuous and incredulous he was, at that time of day, to find his

safety and glory in defending with his whole might the traditions of the elders." But Johnson kept a straight path through these tangled times, because he had "a knowledge of the transcendental, immeasureable character of Duty, the essence of all Religion." This is his great glory, this is the central fact of his life beside which all others are secondary and circumstantial. In thus placing Johnson the moralist high above Johnson the man of letters, Carlyle exalts the hero at the expense of the man. He scarcely more than glances at the interesting figure who gathered the wits about him at the "Club" and who was celebrated as the first talker of London, the perennially delightful personality whom the world knows to-day through the pages of Boswell.

We may infer from Carlyle's slight notice of Johnson as a man of letters that his interest in Johnson's writings is likewise slight. Such is indeed the case. Intent upon interpreting Johnson as a moralist, the critic cares only for the spirit which shows through the *Ramblers,* the *Idlers* and the *Lives.* This spirit he finds to be an expression of Johnson's moral nature. Johnson "by act and word" was a Tory, "the preserver and transmitter of whatsoever was genuine in the spirit of Toryism." The motive of his life was duty, or truth in the transcendental sense; the work of his life was Toryism.[21] In a time of change, when even the foundations of society were in danger of being swept away, Johnson served England by resisting the rising tide of innovation. The moral endowment by which he effected this work was mainly courage, a belief in the "everlasting Truth, that man is ever a Revelation of God to man," and, lastly, mercy and affection. Johnson's affection, Carlyle points out, manifested itself both as courtesy and as prejudice. Prejudice, again, was the virtue by which Johnson accomplished his mission—the mission of serving as the "John Bull of spiritual Europe."

[21] It should be understood that though he preaches duty and truth, Carlyle does not unconditionally preach the "Doctrine of Standing-Still." He does not glorify stagnation either in the individual or in the state. He says that "Johnson's aim was in itself an impossible one; this of stemming the eternal Flood of time. The strongest man can but retard the current partially and for a short hour."

Sound and solid for the most part as is this appreciation, it suffers not a little from Carlyle's determination to see in Johnson only the hero. It is because prejudice was so colossal in Johnson and because he set himself in wilful and violent opposition to nearly every tendency of enlightenment of his times, that most critics cannot place him as high as Carlyle has done; for we are to remember that Johnson was a tory, not alone in politics, but in religion and literature. He was not, moreover, a greater influence than Burke in checking the revolutionary spirit in England. Johnson died four years before the fall of the Bastile, having shown scarcely more than a churlish indifference to France, while Boswell, at work on the biography from 1784 to 1791, has no word concerning the social and political convulsion across the Channel.[22] But we should remember that Carlyle himself was at all times prejudiced against political agitators and was not likely to distinguish beween a Burke and a Wilkes. We should remember also that this interpretation of Johnson was written for readers of 1832 by a man who, though a radical in the philosophical, literary and religious sense, was on precisely the same fundamental principles a determined reactionary in politics and political economy. It was inevitable therefore that he should lift up the heroic figure of Johnson as an example to the men who were drifting through the distracted days of 1832–3.

Of literary criticism in the restricted sense the essay has little more than a suggestion, though the suggestion indicates clearly enough how Carlyle regarded and ranked Johnson's work. "To Johnson's Writings, good and solid, and still profitable as they are, we have already rated his Life and Conversation as superior." "His Doings and Writings are not *Shows* but *Performances*. Not a line, not a sentence is dishonestly done, is other than it pretends to be." Measured by Carlyle's standard Johnson is not a poet. "Into the region of Poetic Art he indeed never rose; there was no *ideal* without him avowing itself in his work." He could not reveal through his writings,

[22] Johnson's indirect influence must have been strong and far-reaching, making itself felt through literature and conversation to the remotest parts of great Britain.

as true poets can through theirs, the Divine Idea. Johnson was a prophet because his character was a medium for transcendental duty; but he was neither a seer nor a poet because his intellect could not transmit truth. From such judgment there is nothing to deduct. Critical opinion from the time of Burke and Coleridge does not differ essentially from Carlyle's as to the value of Johnson's writings. Even the late Dr. Birbeck Hill has declared that Johnson lives not in his writings but in his talk.[23] Carlyle's sin in his interpretation of Johnson the writer is one of omission. He has failed to take account of Johnson as a literary influence, just as he failed to consider, except in a few sentences, Johnson as a man of letters. And it was in the literary sense, of course, not in the political, that Johnson was the dictator of the British public. We must go to other interpreters and critics, therefore, for an account of Johnson's place in literature from Pope to Wordsworth, even as we must turn to Boswell if we wish to know Johnson as a literary personality. But if we are content to know him as a moralist, as a great ethical force in the total English life of the eighteenth century, we shall find that Carlyle is Johnson's truest interpreter.

(*c*) *Scott*

The essay on Sir Walter Scott has increased the number of Carlyle's enemies and apologists. His enemies, or rather those who dislike the man and distrust his criticism, refer to this essay as a spiteful attack of one Scotchman upon his more favored and famous countryman. Mr. Lang, Scott's most recent biographer, asserts that Carlyle was embittered against Scott "on a matter of an unanswered letter."[24] On the other hand Froude apologizes for Carlyle's unsympathetic tone on the ground that he was not yet recovered from the exhaustive labors on the *French Revolution*.[25] So much has been said at one time or another in way of censure or extenuation that we are justified in the present study in briefly reviewing the facts regarding the genesis of the essay and the relations of Carlyle with Scott.

[23] *Dr. Johnson, His Friends and his Critics*, 129.
[24] *Life of Scott*, 129. [25] Froude, *Life*, III, 103.

Carlyle was teaching mathematics at Annan Academy when Scott's novels began to appear. He declared that *Waverley* was the best novel that had been published "these thirty years,"[26] and he read many others with youthful pleasure and admiration. His attitude toward them, however, was not at all different from that toward nearly everything he read at this time. But during the next five or six years a great change took place. Carlyle's intellectual life was expanded and deepened by hard struggle with fortune and by a study of Goethe. In his crystallizing philosophy of life there was little or no place for minor poetry and fiction. It is perfectly consistent with this new turn, that Carlyle should make the following entry in his note-book:

"Sir Walter Scott is the great *Restaurateur* of Europe: he might have been numbered among their Conscript Fathers; he has chosen the worser part, and is only a huge Publicanus. What is his novel, any of them? A bout of champagne, claret, port or even ale drinking. Are we wiser, better, holier, stronger? No! We *have been* amused. O Sir Walter, thou knowest too well, that *Virtus laudatur et alget.*"

A few months later occurs this entry:

"Not one of Scott's Fairservices or Deanses, etc., is *alive.* As far as prose could go, he has gone; and we have fair *outsides;* but within all is hollow."[27]

These private opinions were written down many months before there was a word of correspondence with Goethe concerning medals, and ten years before the essay was composed, and yet they might serve as texts for nearly everything that Carlyle ever said against the life and work of Scott.[28]

With this attitude of Carlyle's before us, let us turn to the unlucky episode of the unanswered letter. Goethe had long been an admirer of the author of *Waverley.* In testimony of his esteem he sent in 1828 two medals to Carlyle to be delivered to Scott. It was very natural for the German poet to suppose

[26] *Early Letters,* 10.

[27] *Two Note-Books,* 71, 126, years 1826 and 1827.

[28] In 1827 Jeffrey offered to introduce Carlyle to Scott, if Carlyle would present himself at the court room. Carlyle declined, but he wrote his brother, apropos of this incident, that Scott was no "mongrel," but a sufficient "hodman." *Letters,* 23, 67.

that the two Scotchmen were acquainted, though he had indeed expressed surprise to Eckermann that Scott had had nothing to say of Carlyle. Obviously Carlyle was flattered to be chosen the messenger between the most famous writer of Germany and the most famous writer of Great Britain, and he wrote Goethe that he expected to present the medals to Sir Walter in person.[29] Unhappily the meeting never took place, for Scott was in London at the time.[30] Carlyle was disappointed not to see Scott and probably piqued not to hear from him. But was he so resentful and even so embittered as to allow his private feelings to condition his published criticism of Scott ten years later? Partisan friends of Sir Walter will probably continue to say that he was, even if they have to disregard the early note-book comments which we have quoted. They will continue to assert that Carlyle vented a "private bitterness," to use Mr. Lang's phrase, though to do so they will have to overlook entirely the complete conformity of the individual judgments in the essay to Carlyle's theory of literature and philosophy of life. On the other hand those who know Carlyle's habits of thought from 1827 to 1837, and have examined the literary relations of Scott and Carlyle during these years will always find it hard to believe that the essay contains a critical opinion that it would not have contained had there been no incident of an unanswered letter. Carlyle's central position toward Scott did not change after the incident, as certain privately expressed opinions fully show.[31] What he believed in 1827 he believed and expressed in 1837. If Carlyle's essay is to be interpreted

[29] *Goethe and Carlyle Corr.*, 83.

[30] "Walter Scott, I did not see, because he was in London; nor hear of, perhaps because he was a busy or uncourteous man; so I left his Goethe-medals to be be given him by Jeffrey" (*Letters*, 115). In correction of Norton's note to this passage it may be said that Carlyle must have known of Scott's financial troubles (*Early Letters*, 344). It was unfortunate that Carlyle never met Scott. He had more than one opportunity and he might have been won by Scott's personality. A regard for the man might have softened Carlyle's tone in the essay. But I do not believe that friendly relations would have caused Carlyle to alter opinions growing out of fundamental beliefs. Such relations did not alter them in the case of John Sterling.

[31] *Two Note-Books*, 214–215; Froude, *Life*, II, 251.

fairly, therefore, we should regard it not as a piece of work inspired by resentment or jealousy, but as a deliberate criticism based upon ideals consistently held and consistently applied to literature for a period of ten years or more.

In structure the essay is not so regular as many others, but in the main it shows an application of the biographical method to the interpretation of Scott's life and work. Carlyle, however, raises the question of Scott's greatness before he comes to systematic criticism. His answer furnishes us with a key to his whole position. Popularity, even the select popularity of Scott, he says, is no measure of greatness. The standard is quite other than that: it is spiritual power and the genius to reveal an idea that makes a man great. Scott is unspiritual because he has no deep passion and expresses no ideas. On the other hand he is "one of the healthiest of men." In a sick and artificial age this robust borderer was appointed by destiny "to be the song-singer and pleasant tale-teller to Britain and Europe. This is the history of the life and achievement of *our* Sir Walter Scott."[32] Carlyle's formula thus becomes clear at the start. Scott is not great, because he does not reveal the "Divine Idea" either in life or in work. He is, however, healthy in nearly all of his relations, and healthiness is the word by which his life and work are properly appreciated.[33]

[32] *Essays,* VI, 38.

[33] To show how repeatedly these standards are applied to man and author, I subjoin two groups of passages. (1) ***Want of ideas, want of spirituality;*** (*a*) "Friends to precision will probably deny his title to the name 'great.' One knows not what idea worthy of the name of great, what purpose, instinct or tendency, that could be called great, Scott was ever inspired with." (*b*) "The great Mystery of Existence was not great to him." (*c*) "A great man is ever, as the Transcendentalists speak, possessed with an *idea.*" (*d*) "Perhaps no literary man of any generation has less value than Scott for the immaterial part of his mission in any sense." (*e*) "Our highest literary man . . . had, as it were, no message whatever to deliver to the world." (*f*) "The candid judge will, in general, require that a speaker, in so extremely serious a universe as this of ours, have something to speak about." (*g*) Scott's letters "do not, in any case whatever, proceed from the innermost parts of the mind," . . . "the man of the world is always visible in them." (*h*) The ***Waverley Novels*** "are altogether addressed to the everyday mind; for any other mind there

Subsequent judgments are made on the basis of this preliminary estimate. Carlyle passes in rapid review the earlier periods of Scott's life, giving an undue prominence perhaps to certain "questionable doings" connected with the "Liddesdale *raids*." He regards the portentous Ballantyne connection as natural in a worldly man like Scott. He criticises Scott's poetry in a desultory manner and seems to consider it as an incident in the author's career and an explanation of this worldly success rather than as literature which merits serious appreciation. At all events, though he does not deny real worth of a kind in the metrical romances, Carlyle explains their immense vogue more on external than on internal grounds. His interest reaches its highest point when he discusses the culminating period of Scott's life, the period of the Waverley Novels. This was the critical time in the career of Scott, when it was to be seen whether he was guided by inner ideals or external considerations. Carlyle's judgment of Scott's character at this point is significant. Though he pronounces the picture presented in the copious extracts from Lockhart's *Life* to be "very beautiful," he unequivocally asserts that Scott, at this period, "with all his health, was *infected*." Scott wrote impromptu novels to buy farms with and his tragedy was due not to bankruptcy, but to false ambition. "His way of life," says Carlyle, "was not wise." Thus as in the case of Burns, the

is next to no nourishment in them;" "not profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for edification, for building up or elevating in any shape;" "they do not form themselves on deep interests, but on comparatively trivial ones." (*z*) *Healthiness;* (*a*) Not a great man but "the healthiest of men." (*b*) "Were one to preach a sermon on Health, Scott ought to be the text." (*c*) The happiest circumstance of all is, that Scott had in himself a right healthy soul." (*d*) "Scott's healthiness showed itself decisively in all things, and nowhere more decisively than in this: the way in which he took his fame." (*e*) "If no skyborn messenger—a substantial, peaceable, terrestrial man." (*f*) "Letters they are of a most humane man of the world." (*g*) "Scott's rapidity is great, is a proof and consequence of the sound health of the man, bodily and spiritual." (*h*) ". . . in general *healthiness* of mind, these Novels prove Scott to have been amongst the foremost of writers." In connection with so many praises of Scott's health this passage should not be forgotten: "Alas, Scott with all his health, was *infected*."

critic pierces to the soul of Scott and interprets his failure solely upon spiritual grounds. This searching judgment of course carries with it the corollary that the Waverley Novels were in large measure the product of a commercialized mind.

It was inevitable that this appreciation of the life and work of Scott should have aroused the anger of those who honored him as one of the most lovable and manly of men and as the most delightful story-teller of their day. But Carlyle's judgment is the expression of higher standards than the average critic is wont to apply to life and literature. He measured Scott in 1837 by exactly the same standards which he had applied to Richter in 1827 and to Johnson in 1832. However manly or delightful Scott was he was not great or noble because he did not dedicate his character and his art to the expression of truth. In saying or implying this opinion, Carlyle of course does not mean to suggest, as some seem to have supposed, that truth is a barren formula or thesis, or that it is synonymous with the Thirty-nine Articles. We have gone with him too far to suspect him of such shallow thinking. He hated the doctrinaire even more heartily than do some of his unfriendly critics. But he never departed from his belief that the life of a truly great man, whether poet or prophet, must be felt to be under the direction of some central purpose or idea, through which it becomes related to the vast invisible potentialities of the universe. Whether you call this inner force an idea, or a message, it is something which the great man will ever strive to utter and for the sake of which he is willing to sacrifice all else in life.

Scott was not born for this kind of greatness. His mind was not spiritual in this lofty sense. It was not even intellectual, if by intellectuality we mean a passionate interest in abstract truth or in the deeper things of character and art, such as Browning had, for example. To Scott the world was not the vesture of an idea, as it was to Carlyle. Dreamer though he was, his dreams were always of a romantic, never of a mystical world. He was a mediævalist through and through, but he delighted in the mediævalism of Ariosto, not of Dante. He was also an unaffected man of the world. "I have been no

sigher in the Shades," he said. "I love the virtues of rough-and-round men." He was human on every side, his nature was patriotic, paternal, social. What philosophy he pretended to have, he exercised in managing his everyday life. Carlyle is not indeed indifferent to these splendid qualities in Sir Walter. He praises the good sense and sanity, the manliness, bravery and genial humanity of Scott, in passages of great beauty and power. But running through this golden character he saw a streak of baser metal, which in his opinion lowered its worth. He could no more approve of the building of Abbotsford than he could approve of the ethics of Bentham or the political principles of the American people. Scott and Carlyle as men lived in different worlds and according to different standards.

In art as well as in life their realms were widely sundered. Scott's literary ideals, as expressed in his own writings and in Lockhart's *Life,* are well known. He wrote to amuse, not to edify or to convey transcendental truth. He would not have understood, or if he had understood he would not have taken seriously, the Fichtean notion of the man of letters as a revealer of the "Divine Idea." He had no illusions concerning his position as a writer. Like Molière he felt that his art served its ends if it brought applause from his audience. He considered literature a profession, not a martyrdom. He regarded his ability to write books very much as a man to-day regards his business ability, as a means with which he may make a success of life both financially and socially. Authorship as a calling to which one solemnly dedicates himself was farthest from Scott's thought; that, as he said, was for the Shakespeares and the Molières, but not for him. With these ideals, accompanied with such gifts as he had, Scott was for Carlyle a minor writer, not an artist of the first rank. And for minor writers the criticism of Carlyle has virtually no place, because they do not add new meanings to our conception of life. While Carlyle's interpretation of Scott reaches therefore negative conclusions and is expressed, we must own, in a spirit sometimes needlessly harsh, it is as a whole entirely in harmony with his literary and critical doctrine.

The individual opinions or estimates which follow upon Carlyle's general judgment are nearly all adverse, and some of them are so unbalanced as to indicate that his want of sympathy with the literature of amusement and with the kind of life that Scott lived got the better of his judgment. When, for example, he lumps Scott's characters together and says that they are created "from the skin inwards," he sees no difference between the conventional heroes and heroines of the Waverley Novels and the genuine, if not heroic, figures drawn from humble life. When, again, he says that these novels are melodramatic and mechanically constructed, he lays the blame partly upon Scott's habits of extempore composition, without giving him any recognition for the labor of those early years when Scott was filling his mind with an inexhaustible store of material for his books. The truth is that Carlyle is too ready to explain not only Scott's shortcomings as a man but his limitations as a literary artist upon the ground of his worldly ambitions as shown conspicuously in the building at Abbotsford. The critic gives way to the moralist, for in this instance he fails properly and fairly to correlate Scott's mind and temperament with his work, or carefully to consider Scott's whole view of literary craftsmanship. Undoubtedly Scott's financial affairs and worldly ambitions influenced his work in literature. But considering his habitual attitude toward his art, before and after Abbotsford was built, it is safer to say that his work would not have been essentially different had there been no decorating of walls and no collecting of old armor.

But Carlyle's waning interest in literature considered apart from ideas is responsible for many gaps in his appreciation of Scott. Scott's greatness as a story-teller, his amazing fertility in invention, his skill as a scene-painter are passed over. So, too, are his place and influence in the history of English literature. Carlyle does indeed refer lightly to Scott's relation to the "buff-belted watch-tower period of literature." But this is quite inadequate in the case of a far-extending influence like Scott's. The essay therefore in spite of numerous flashes of inspired opinion and many brilliant word-pictures is

never likely to satisfy the reading world as an interpretation of Scott. As an analysis of the man it over-emphasizes his worldliness and in consequence fails to bring into proper relief the really great moral qualities of his character. As a critique of the author it fails even more decidedly because it is so largely incomplete and negative and because it explains Scott's defects as a writer too largely in terms of his moral weakness in building Abbotsford. But as a Carlyle document the essay is invaluable and it is likely to live as long as an interest in Carlyle endures. It is on all sides an exact expression of the man. In the study of Carlyle as critic it is of peculiar importance, for it is the best illustration we have of the application of his ideas of life, literature and criticism to a distinguished writer whose works he regarded as of minor value, fit only to amuse the indolent or languid mind.

CHAPTER IX

From Criticism to Prophecy

Although the essay on Sir Walter Scott was the last formal criticism that Carlyle wrote, it by no means marks the end of his interest in literature and in men of letters. Forty years from that time he read Gibbon through again and dipped into Swift, Sterne and Voltaire, and during all the intervening period, even while he was wrestling with his *Cromwell* and his *Frederick,* his eye was keen to see the movements of men in the field of letters. In the earlier years of this later period he lectured on heroes and on the history of literature, and he wrote a life of his friend John Sterling; and in each instance he gave much evidence of his critical interest in literature. Evidence of a similar kind is abundant too, in reminiscences, letters, political pamphlets, and even in the ponderous histories themselves. Moreover Carlyle himself had now become one of the foremost figures in a great age of literature and he numbered among his friends and acquaintance nearly every English writer of high rank. He breathed the air in which great literature was created. He could not altogether escape it, if he would. Froude remarks that Carlyle read more miscellaneously than any man he had ever known, that he was as familiar with English literature as Macaulay and knew German, French and Italian literatures infinitely better. "His knowledge," says Froude, "was not in points or lines, but complete and solid."[1] His views, however, remained essentially what they had been, though his language often became ridiculously extravagant in its expression of them.

Wordsworth, Tennyson and Browning he knew and liked as men but not as poets. He once spoke of Wordsworth's poetry as "pastoral pipings,"[2] and Tennyson's *Princess* he thought

[1] Froude, IV, 218.

[2] Duffy, *Conversations with Carlyle,* 55.

"had everything but common sense,"[3] while in the *Idylls* he recognized "the inward perfection of vacancy."[4] He admired Browning's intellectual and spiritual power, but urged him to write in prose. The early Ruskin he did not care for, though he expressed high appreciation of Ruskin's later works. Emerson was a life-long friend and Carlyle praised the "tone of veracity" in his essays, though in later life he came to regard the American sage's writings as thin and moonshiny, like the articles in the *Dial.* Newman, Keble and Jowett, churchmen all, he spoke of in contemptuous terms.

The novelists for the most part be dismissed in disgust, especially Trollope, Jane Austen, George Sand and Balzac. Thackeray, whom he disliked as a man, he rated higher than Dickens, whom he liked; "Thackeray," he said to Sir Charles Duffy, "has more reality in him, and would cut up into a dozen Dickenses."[5] His standard was the same in all cases. He praised the literature that seemed to him truthful, veracious, faithful to fact and reality, but he generally complained that the books of his day were either false or shallow and trifling, and that literature had fallen from its position of power.

The fact is Carlyle was too deeply absorbed in his own work and mission and had gone too far along his own appointed path to appreciate fairly the work of his contemporaries. While a great and enduring literature was being created all about him, he stood apart as a prophet to preach to his generation his gospel of hero-worship and work. This position by which he is best known to the world Carlyle began to assume at a period that is coincident with his work upon *Sartor Resartus,* that is to say, from the fall of 1830 onward. From this time we may date the beginning of his change from criticism to prophecy. The causes of this change were several. When he went to London in 1831, for the second time, he found literature, as he believed, to be either dying or dead and offering no hope to one of his belief and purpose. His slight acquaintance with the foremost literary men of that day, Cole-

[3] Espinasse, *Literary Recollections,* 214.
[4] *Emerson-Carlyle Corr.,* II, 340. [5] *Conversations,* 76.

ridge, Hazlitt, Lamb and De Quincey, Godwin, Lockhart and Leigh Hunt, left him for the most part disheartened and disgusted with the profession of letters. It was indeed a time of transition. The age of romantic literature had culminated and the Victorian era was yet to come. Politics, too, and the state of society excited his gloomy apprehension. It was the time of reform agitation and Carlyle looked out upon a world adrift on change. He could not be content to write reviews when he saw, as he said in *Sartor,* "a world becoming dismantled." It was a time for the deliverance of his own message, the message he had learned partly from experience but largely from German literature and philosophy. It was not a time for reviewing a moribund English literature. Moreover Carlyle was tired of reviewing, he was wearied, he said, with scribbling for capricious editors for uncertain pay. He therefore went up to London in 1831 with the manuscript of *Sartor.* He was about to abdicate the office of critic and to assume the rôle of prophet. Unable to find a publisher for *Sartor,* he wrote *Characteristics* for the *Edinburgh Review* and his essay on Johnson for *Fraser's Magazine,* both articles announcing a change from criticism to prophecy.[6]

This change in office implies no alteration in Carlyle's philosophy of life or theory of poetry. Philosophy is poetry and poetry is philosophy and both are life and reality: from this creed he never departed. It was no part of his literary theory that meter or rhyme is essential to poetry. He always laid the great emphasis upon the message, the meaning, the truth expressed. Upon this theory, it is the same if you say that poetry is life or that life is poetry; and Carlyle did declare in his first essay on Goethe that "all good men may be called poets in act, or in word."[7] It is the same if you say that the poet is the highest man of his time or that the highest man of his time is a poet. The poet is he who expresses life, whether

[6] Carlyle struggled for years to find a suitable form for his original work. As early as 1822 he experimented unsuccessfully with verse, but, as Froude says, he could not "master the mechanical difficulties of the art" (Froude, *Life,* I, 138, 205). He had tried the novel, but this also proved too refractory.

[7] *Essays,* I, 180.

in rhymes or in deeds. In an age, therefore, in which, as Carlyle sees it, life is not to be found in literature, he will turn for it to biography and to history. From 1831 he finds poetry, reality, that is, less and less in literature and more and more in the lives of great men. Goethe the poet becomes Goethe the hero. Transcendental truth, no longer discoverable in the books that men write, is to be found in the lives that heroes have lived.

Evidences of this transition from criticism to prophecy are to be seen everywhere in the essays written after 1830. Even in one essay of 1830, the second *Richter,* Carlyle points out that he is now looking from the poem to the poet.[8] In the *Schiller* (1831) he disgresses to discuss happiness and to condemn utilitarian ethics. From 1830 onward he refers more and more often to "our age." Hardly an essay but echoes the reform movement or contains references to the French Revolution. Some essays, for example *Mirabeau,* are wholly biographical and historical, while others, as *Diderot,* show that Carlyle has greater interest in history and biography than in literature. The message is the thing. We hear now from Sauerteig, Smelfungus, Teufelsdröckh, who are introduced to give harangues on the great man and his uses. It would be possible indeed to regard all the later and greater essays as tracts for the times, though to do this we should be laying emphasis upon certain features at the expense of others. In *Voltaire,* which is a little earlier than the period of prophecy, Carlyle is declaring against skepticism and denial; in *Diderot* he preaches against mechanism and a mechanical age. Even the essay on Scott, last of the critical essays, is from one point of view a declaration against worldliness. On the other hand the essay on *Boswell's Life on Johnson* is written partly for the purpose of presenting to a drifting social order the figure of a man who held fast to duty; while the second *Goethe* holds up the true prophet for the time, the man who builds, who has lived a whole life, in contrast to the man of Carlyle's time, who destroys and who has lived only a half life. The change from criticism to prophecy becomes more apparent still, if we con-

[8] *Essays,* III, 5.

trast the first with the second essay on Goethe, the essay on Voltaire with that on Diderot. In the earlier essays the treatment is distinctly more literary, more critical, the men are more broadly discussed as men of letters and the critic is interested in the men and their work more for their own sake and less for the purpose of advancing a message. In the later essays the prophet frequently replaces the critic. "For us in these days," wrote Carlyle, "prophecy (well understood), not poetry, is the thing wanted. How can we *sing* and *paint* when we do not yet *believe* and *see*?"[9] Therefore Carlyle stands apart to preach against Coleridgean philosophy and shovel-hattism, Benthamite Ethics and the whole doctrine of utilitarianism, against reform and the new democracy, against industrialism and *laizzez faire*. At exactly the time when Tennyson was leading in a new age of poetry, Carlyle was "throwing down his critical assaying balance."[10] He now began to declare that not the poet only, but every worker "bodies forth the forms of Things Unseen."[11]

[9] Froude, *Life*, II, 299.

[10] *Essays*, IV, 184. See the opening paragraph to *Corn-Law Rhymes* for Carlyle's farewell to criticism.

[11] *Past and Present*, 176.

CHAPTER X

Carlyle's Criticism

Carlyle's literary criticism, like all human products, has its defects and its merits, its weakness as well as its strength. Of the four great requisites of a critic—insight, knowledge, sympathy and detachment—he possessed the first two in large measure, but he was often wanting in sympathy and he was seldom able to maintain the judicial attitude towards his material. If he is in sympathy with his writer, as in the case of Goethe, his position is confessedly that of an advocate. Like the lawyer he is for or against the question at issue: if in an author he discovers merits, it is to praise them; if he finds defects, it is to condemn them. He does not sit apart and coolly exercise the function of a judge. In truth as Carlyle grew older, he showed less and less of the ideal temper and taste of the critic. Where his taste and sympathy were not appealed to, he was apt to become intolerant and sometimes frankly antagonistic. His tastes and sympathies, moreover, excluded a large area of literature from the field of his interest, and hence his services to criticism were very considerably limited. Carlyle was by nature deficient in sympathy with two great forms of literature, the novel and the drama. Of the novel regarded as a medium for the communication of a philosophy of life or a theory of education and culture, such as Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister,* he of course made an exception. The dramas too of Shakespeare, Goethe and Schiller, considered apart from the theatre and solely as interpretations of life, he read and wrote about with enthusiasm. But interest in story, plot, or character-development he had little, even from the first. His theory of art, as well as his taste and sympathy, left but a small place for purely imaginative, as distinguished from interpretative, literature. He did not care for the sensuous poetry of Keats, for the ethereal music of Shelley, or for

the witchery in the poetry of Coleridge. He found little good and much harm or frivolousness in the poetry of Byron and Scott. Carlyle went to poetry for ideas, and in the imaginative poetry of English romanticism he declared that he found none. Such poetry was therefore beyond the reach of his criticism.

The rhythm, the music, the phrase, in short the form of literature, did not much interest Carlyle. As we have pointed out in a previous chapter, it was no part of his doctrine that poetry should be in metrical language. He delighted in the songs of Burns and in some of Goethe, but these were exceptions. With almost the single exception of the essay on Burns, his criticism takes no notice of what Coleridge praises in the poetry of Wordsworth, the "strength and originality," the "*curiosa felicitas*" of single lines and paragraphs. This attitude is shown also in his want of interest in minor writers, whose appeal is so apt to be one of lines or stanzas, but not one of solid meanings and a single body of ideas. So intent was he to discover ideas and to proclaim them when found that Carlyle sometimes indeed goes to the very opposite extreme to æstheticism. He becomes didactic. Even the earlier essays are not entirely free from this tendency and the later ones show a good deal of it. He steers clear of the dangers of neo-classic criticism, but he does not wholly escape the perils of a criticism that emphasizes the moral value of ideas.

Over against these shortcomings are to be set certain merits in Carlyle's work as a critic. He possessed knowledge and insight not surpassed by any critic of his period. In knowledge alone he was superior to Lamb or Hazlitt and hardly equalled by Coleridge, whose knowledge, at all events, was far less coherent than Carlyle's. His insight, his sheer power to interpret the vital values of literature, was at its best very great. He believed with Hazlitt that a critic should fix his ideas at the center, not at the circumference, of life and literature. Goethe acknowledged Carlyle's ability in this direction. He thought it remarkable that Carlyle in his criticism of German authors should seek out the spiritual and moral kernel; the Scot, he said, seeks to penetrate the work. Carlyle's knowledge and insight are amply displayed in the massive

essays that he wrote. He was drawn to great writers, he delighted to study them in relation to their age and to extract from the volume of their writings the sum-total of their criticism of life. To do this great knowledge and great interpretative power are necessary. The critic must have interests beyong the merely literary, he must be competent to understand and interpret influences, social and political, religious and philosophical, that have united to shape great minds, such for example, as Goethe, Voltaire and Diderot. Carlyle resembles Goethe himself in his ability to bring to the interpretation of men and books a wide knowledge and a rare power of penetration. If to this insight and information we add his spirit of independence, his moral force in breaking away from tradition and convention, we must admit that Carlyle was fitted to perform a substantial and permanent service for English literary criticism.

This service may be summarized briefly. In the first place Carlyle defined more clearly and accurately than contemporary English critics the aims and methods of the new criticism. He was the first to define the historical method, and he carried the use of it further than did other critics of his day. He prepared the way for the criticism that has gained so much favor and currency in recent years, a criticism in which literature is interpreted in relation to the life of its creator and to the age in which he lived. Carlyle saw more clearly than his contemporaries the value of the comparative method; and in his German essays he made much use of this method in tracing parallel streams of influence in German and English romanticism. Secondly, Carlyle deserves a permanent place in English criticism as an introducer of German literature, especially that of Goethe, into England. From 1828 to 1850 he was the best, indeed almost the only, interpreter of German thought in England, and he was recognized as the critic who had done most to spread the knowledge of it among English people. Goethe's first great critic in England was Carlyle. Thirdly, Carlyle at his best was (apart from his pioneer service for German literature) a really great interpreter of men of letters and of literature. He was the first to recognize the genius of

Boswell and he was the first Englishman of importance to interpret Voltaire. His essays on Burns and on Johnson are still the best of their class. These are services of themselves substantial enough to entitle Carlyle to a worthy place in the history of English criticism. Finally we must add the work that he did in common with other English critics of romanticism. He lent his knowledge and his insight, his moral courage and his intellectual independence, to the establishment of the cardinal principle in all modern criticism, that literature is to be judged, as Professor Saintsbury expresses it, "not by adjustment to anything else, but on its own merits."[1]

[1] *Hist. of Criticism*, III, 4.

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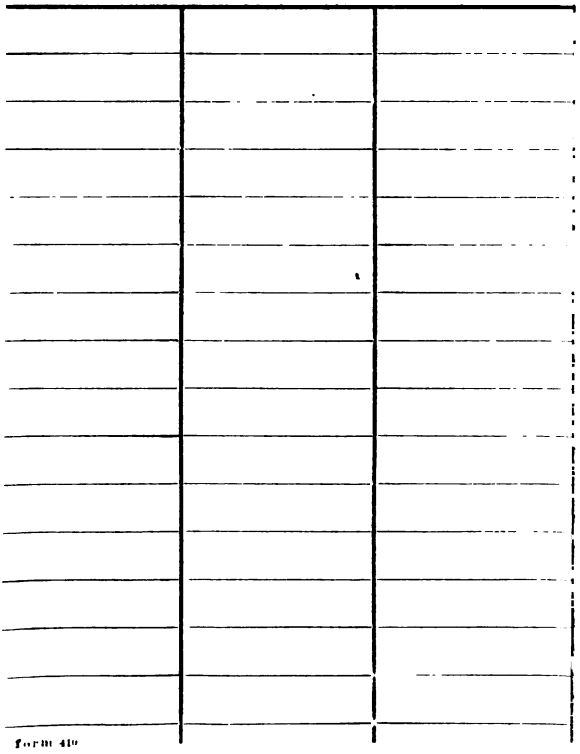
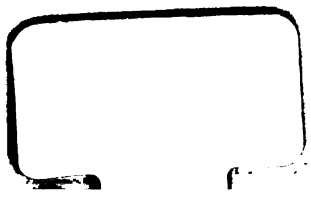
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